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TO

THE PARISHIONERS OF HALESWORTH,

THIS WORK,

COMPOSED ORIGINALLY FOR THEIR USE,

IS INSCRIBED,

WITH FERVENT PRAYERS

FOR THEIR PRESENT AND ETERNAL WELFARE,

BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

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PREFACE.

THE following series of Lectures having proved interesting and edifying to many of those to whom they were originally addressed, the Author has been induced to publish them, in the hope that others also may derive from them a similar benefit.

He has thought it advisable to print them almost exactly as they were delivered;—in the homely and simple style which was adopted with a view to the instruction of a mixed congregation, consisting principally of the unlearned. This style has been retained, as appearing the best suited to meet the wants of various classes of readers, and the most in accordance with the character of a work designed to be, in its matter, plain and popular, without any abstruse metaphysical disquisitions.*

* The extensive sale of the work has been urged as a reason for changing the style in this respect; but the opposite conclusion would seem the more natural.

Perhaps who have not been much personally engaged in the care of a parish, or of one similarly circumstanced to the Author's, may be disposed to doubt the prevalence, or even the existence of some of the errors he has had occasion to combat; or, on the other hand, may question the capacity of any part of a country congregation to follow, or take an interest in some of his discussions. He has been guided, however, throughout, as to these points, by *experience*, which he is convinced will lead others, who will fairly refer to that test, to the same conclusions.

Let a Minister but fairly try the experiment, of not confining himself, as many do, to mere general *exhortations* to religion and virtue, but patiently and assiduously *lecturing* his people, and drawing them gradually to take an interest in the *explanation* of each part of Scripture; and after persevering in this for some years, he will find the minds of the less educated classes much less barren than perhaps he now finds them.

The Author has been careful neither to give offence to any, *unnecessarily*, nor, through fear of giving offence, to keep back what appear to him important truths; being aware that, on the one hand, we are bound to take the best care

we can, that our "good be not evil spoken of," and that, on the other hand, no doctrine, whether true or false, is likely to be, at first sight, acceptable to those who are, either in theory or in practice, opposed to it.*

He is aware that, on several of the points treated of, various opinions (many of them of course not appearing to him well-founded) have been entertained, both by some of those ancient Divines commonly called "the Fathers,†" and

* Two worthy and intelligent clergymen, friends of the author, wrote to him to express their strong disapprobation of one particular Lecture; which they entreated him either to suppress or materially alter. Just at the same time, another highly respectable clergyman, personally a stranger to the author, wrote to him to ask permission to publish, separately, in a cheap form, for distribution, *that very Lecture;* which he considered as particularly valuable!

Just such a contrariety of judgment, doubtless, often takes place with respect to many a book, without so distinctly coming to the author's knowledge. But no writer who has had this diversity of opinions so strongly brought before him, ought either to calculate on universal approbation, or again, to be disheartened by meeting with occasional censure.—*Preface to Lectures on Angels*, p. viii., ix.

† It may perhaps be necessary, for the sake of some readers, to observe, in this place, that it is not intended to cast any contempt on these writers. The number is very great, even of those whose works have come down to us, without reckoning those whose works are lost; they flourished in different ages and in different

also by more modern writers of high reputation of our own, and of other Churches. But he has thought it best to abstain, for the most part, from all reference to these; partly, because few of his hearers were acquainted with their works, or competent to estimate aright the weight that may be due to the authority of each of them; but chiefly, because his design was to inquire exclusively what is to be learned from the records of *inspiration*, respecting a subject on which uninspired men, he conceives, however learned and ingenious, can know no more than is revealed in Scripture, or may, by short and simple arguments, be deduced from it. And as

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countries; and being all of them uninspired men, of very various qualifications in point of knowledge and of ability, it would evidently be equally rash to speak of "the Fathers," indiscriminately, with contempt or with veneration.

As there were many sound, and many unsound, religious teachers in the times of the apostles, so, it is to be supposed, there have been ever since. But there is this important difference; that while the apostles flourished, *their* infallible authority decided for us *whose* doctrines were sound, and whose erroneous; *after* their time, though we have every reason to suppose that some truth and some error are still taught, we are left to make out for ourselves from Scripture, by the light of Reason, under the guidance of the ordinary aid of the Holy Spirit, which is the true, and which the untrue doctrine.

the conjectures of uninspired men, when unsupported by revelation, can, in such a case, claim no authority, so, neither has any one a right to insist on the reception, as an article of faith, of any doctrine which he may conceive deducible indeed from Scripture, but deducible only by some process of reasoning which ordinary Christians cannot follow. Whatever points of revelation the Almighty designs to be received universally, we may be sure He must have made universally accessible.

Whatever, therefore, in the course of the work, the Author has suggested as appearing to him probable, but not plainly laid down in Scripture, he has endeavoured to present to the reader as conjectural only, and not claiming unhesitating and general assent. In more than one instance where he has been represented as distinctly maintaining the one of two opinions, this representation will be found to rest on no better ground than that he has considered the opposite opinion as not fully *proved;* and he has been considered as teaching some doctrine as a part of Scripture, merely because he has denied that the Scriptures reveal anything on the subject: as if, because one of two conclusions must be, in *itself*, *true*, it were necessary that he should not only be certain *which* is true

but certain of it as a matter of revelation. He can only protest once more against such a misrepresentation, and appeal to numerous passages in the work, which inculcate the wisdom and the safety of remaining in doubt on the points in question.

Two additional Lectures, on what is usually, though improperly, called preparation for death (delivered at a different time, but before the same audience), have been introduced into the series, on account of their connexion with the subject.

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SCRIPTURE REVELATIONS

CONCERNING

A FUTURE STATE.

LECTURE I.

Life and Immortality brought to Light through the Gospel.

We are told by the Apostle Paul (2 Tim. i. 10) that it is "our Saviour Jesus Christ that hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." That it is to Him, and to Him alone, that we owe this revelation—"the bringing in of this better hope,"—(as it is expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews,)—that neither Jew nor Gentile had, or could have, an assurance of a future state, but through the Gospel,—is a truth so plainly taught in Scripture, and so fully confirmed by what we read in other books concerning

the notions formerly entertained on the subject, that its having been doubted or denied by any Christian is to me a matter of unfeigned wonder. There are, however, not a few who do deny or overlook this truth;—I mean, who maintain, or who take for granted, that the doctrine of a future life was revealed to the Jews, and was discovered by the ancient heathens; and *consequently* (for there is no avoiding that *consequence*) that Jesus Christ *did not* "bring life and immortality to light," but merely gave men an additional assurance of a truth which they already knew.

It may be worth while to take a short view of the circumstances which have led men into this opinion;—the causes which have induced them to believe that the doctrine of a future state was revealed, or clearly discovered, before our Lord's coming.

That Man was originally created of an immortal nature, and that our first Parents would have been exempt from death but for a change introduced into their nature at the Fall, is by some

persons taken for granted very hastily. The Scripture-account in Genesis rather implies the contrary; viz. that they were to be preserved from death by the continual use of a certain medicine (as it may be called) appointed for that purpose,—the fruit of "the Tree of Life:" for we are told that Man was driven out of Eden, "lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live for ever."

Some again have hence concluded that Man was not indeed created of an immortal nature, but such that he would have been endued with immortality by once tasting of the Tree of Life; and that consequently our first Parents never did eat of it. But this is a mere unsupported conjecture; and manifestly a very improbable one. It seems much more likely that they had not abstained from what was so evidently desirable, and fully permitted. And there is nothing improbable in the supposition that this fruit was endued with the virtue of fortifying the constitution,—by being applied from time to time,—against the decays of age; in the

same manner as ordinary food from day to day supports us against death and from famine; or as, in some persons, the habitual use of certain medicines is found to keep off some particular disease. It is not at all incredible, that the Creator may have bestowed on some fruit such a virtue; which is not, in itself, at all more wonderful than that opium, for instance, should produce sleep, or strong liquors a temporary madness.

Supposing then this to have been the true state of the case, our first Parents, though they had eaten of the Tree of Life, would, of course, when afterwards debarred from the use of it, not live for ever. But it is worth remarking, that if we were to hazard a conjecture on the subject, we should expect to find that persons whose constitution had for a time been thus fortified, though they would at length die, yet would live much longer than man's natural term of years; and that they would even be likely to transmit such a constitution to their descendants as should confer on these also a great degree of longevity; which would only wear out

gradually, in many successive generations.

Now it is curious to observe that this is exactly what we do find recorded. Adam and his immediate descendants exceeded tenfold the ordinary term of human life: and we find this longevity *gradually* and slowly diminishing in many successive generations, till about the time of Moses; who began his mission in the full vigour of life, at fourscore, and lived to 120. Joshua lived 110 years. And from thenceforward human life appears to have been brought down to about its present limit.

That the natural immortality, again, of man's soul, as distinct from the body, is discoverable by human reason, may be denied on the ground that it has not in fact been discovered yet. No arguments from Reason independent of Revelation have been brought forward, that amount to a decisive proof that the soul must survive bodily death. Indeed, as I shall presently take occasion to show, the arguments by which some philosophers did attempt to prove this, were not sufficient to convince fully even themselves.

As for the doctrine of a *Resurrection*, that *this* was made known by Moses in the Law delivered through him to the Israelites, is an error which may be traced chiefly to a misinterpretation of one of our Lord's expressions in speaking to the Sadducees; "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures;" and again, "Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush,* when he calleth the Lord, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Hence it is erroneously concluded, that this passage was intended by Moses as a revelation of the doctrine of the resurrection to the Israelites of *his own time;* though common sense might convince any one that such an al-

* "At the bush:" these words He used (according to the custom of the Jews), to refer his hearers to the particular passage in the book of Exodus to which He was alluding; in the same manner as *we* should cite the chapter and verse. It is well known that the divisions into chapters and verses were not made by the authors of any of the books, either of the Old or New Testament, but were introduced many Ages after their time, for convenience of reference. For want of this contrivance, it appears to have been the practice for any one who quoted Scripture, to point out which passage he meant, by citing some remarkable words which their hearers would be likely to recollect; such as "Moses at the bush."

lusion as *that*, never could have served to *make known* the doctrine to any one who had previously known nothing of the subject, nor was engaged in an inquiry concerning it; especially such a dull, gross-minded, and unthinking people as the Israelites; who appear to have been (like children) so wholly taken up with the objects present to their senses, that they could hardly be brought to think of anything beyond the morrow. The Sadducees, whom our Lord was addressing, *had* heard of the doctrine, and were engaged in disputes concerning it with their opponents the Pharisees; and when *they* consulted Scripture, they might have found an argument in favour of it, in the passage to which Jesus referred them. But that is a very different thing from *learning* the doctrine in the first instance from that passage, as if that were designed to *reveal* it. It is indeed quite plain, that in fact, this passage *had* not revealed it to either party; for our Lord's application of the text was evidently *new* to both: it "put the Sadducees to silence."

And it should be considered how much

more familiar and easy to be taken in by the mind is the notion of temporal rewards and punishments, than that of an immortal life after death,*—of judgments and blessings beyond the grave; especially to a rude, ignorant, and unreflecting people, occupied with what was before their eyes, like the Israelites to whom Moses wrote. One cannot but suppose, therefore, that had he intended to reveal to them this last doctrine—to make the rewards and punishments of a future state in any degree the sanction of his laws—and to impress their minds with the expectation of these,—one cannot, I say, but suppose, that he would by no means have trusted to a few slight hints, obliquely and obscurely conveyed; but would have insisted on the doctrine even much *more* fully, and

* Even at this day one may hear people talk of a great storm, a bad harvest, a defeat in war, a pestilence, and other such temporal afflictions, as judgments from Heaven for our sins; either from feeling themselves, or believing that others will feel, more impressed and roused to repentance by these, which, after all, we have no right to conclude do fall especially on the most sinful, than with the judgments and rewards of a future state, which really *are* the sanction of the Gospel dispensation. See "Discourse on National Blessings and Judgments."

frequently, and clearly, than on the *present* rewards or judgments they were to expect in this life. Now these *last* he describes at great length, and insists upon with the plainest and most solemn assurances, more than a hundred times over: whereas there are, at most, but a very few passages in all his writings that *have* been interpreted, and that *can* be interpreted, to relate to the doctrine of a future state; and *that*, in the most indirect and obscure manner. So that I am at a loss to understand how those who assert that Moses *intended* to reveal and teach this doctrine, can, if they attentively consider the subject, bring themselves seriously to believe what they maintain; especially if they are in the habit of exhorting and instructing Christians; and consequently are aware how very difficult it is to bring even *them* to keep in mind that there is another life.

One of the circumstances which mislead inattentive readers into the idea, that the doctrine of a future state formed a part of the Mosaic Dispensation, is, the frequent occurrence, in our translation of the Old

Testament, of the word "soul:" which in the *New* Testament is oftener employed (as it usually is in the present day) in speaking of the condition of a man after death: when, for example, we speak of a man's saving or losing his soul, *we* are always alluding to the next life; in the same manner as our Lord says, "fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell:" and the like in many other passages. And hence many are led to understand in the same sense, a multitude of passages in the Old Testament which speak of the soul, and of the salvation of the soul: whereas, the common meaning of the word which is rendered soul in the Old Testament, is nothing more than *life*, or the spirit united with the body; as you may perceive from many places where it occurs: as, for example, when the destruction of any city of the Canaanites by Joshua is recorded, we read, "that all the *souls* therein he utterly destroyed;" that is, all the *lives*.

There are, however, many parts of the

Old Testament, in which the doctrine is rather less obscurely alluded to than in the books of Moses; but then these are prophetical passages, either in the prophetical Psalms of David, or in works of the other prophets; the most important office of the prophets being to prepare the way for the approach of the Messiah's kingdom, and give hints of the nature of his glorious Gospel, which "brought life and immortality to light." But this does not prove that the doctrine of a future state was revealed by Moses, or was a part of the sanction of his law. The Gospel and its doctrines were not a part of the Mosaic Dispensation; though that was intended to prepare the way for it, and to serve as the first part of the same great scheme of Providence. Now, if Moses had taught men to hope for eternal happiness through Jesus Christ, he would not have been *preparing the way for*, but would have been actually *preaching* the Gospel before the time; if, on the other hand, he had taught them that they could earn eternal life by any good works of their own, independently of Jesus

Christ, he would have told them what was not true.

"The Law," accordingly, we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, (that is, the Law of Moses,) "made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did." The Law was an imperfect, preparatory dispensation; and the "better hope," that of eternal life, instead of temporal prosperity,—was reserved for the more perfect dispensation, that of the Gospel.

It is true that same epistle represents Abraham, and Moses himself, and other illustrious patriarchs, as looking for this "better hope:" but there is no reason why these eminent persons may not have been more fully enlightened than the great body of the people. It is probable they were so.

As for the instances recorded of Enoch, and of the prophet Elijah, who were taken up into God's immediate presence without tasting of death (which some have insisted on), these might indeed have given ground for *suspecting*, to one who was engaged on the subject, that a future state *might* be designed for all men; but if

any one should have gone beyond this, and positively concluded from these instances, that there *must* be such a state, he would surely have been very rash in his conclusions; for he might as well have concluded that *he* himself should *never die* at all, because that was the case with Enoch and Elijah. And accordingly, our Lord, in his argument with the Sadducees, does not allude to these cases (which were manifestly *extraordinary* ones, and *exceptions* to the general rule), but to what is said of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who were known to have died the common death of other men; so that if *they* were spoken of as still living, in another state, the like might be inferred of all men.

But it would not have been allowable to reason generally from instances confessedly peculiar. If a statesman or military commander, of eminent courage and ability, rises to high distinction, no one infers from this that those who are not so qualified are likely to attain the same. And several of the heathen writers seem to have believed, or at least taught, that a future existence was a prize for exalted

and pre-eminent virtue. One of the ablest of the Roman writers (Tacitus) speaks of it as the opinion of philosophers that "the souls of great men do not die with the body."

We find, accordingly, that many pious men among the Jews, and who were doubtless well acquainted with the books of Moses, not only did not understand that a future state was revealed to them in those books, but even seem to have had no expectation of such a state. Take as an instance, the Psalmist, who says, "What profit is there in my blood when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth?" (Ps. xxx.) And again, "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave, and thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" (Ps. lxxxviii.) The same tone prevails in the prayer of the pious king Hezekiah, when he was recovered from the sickness with which his life had been

threatened: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast, in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back. For the grave cannot praise thee; death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day." (Isaiah, chap. xxxviii.)

The doctrine, however, of a future state, was, at the time of our Lord's coming, the belief of the greater part (the Pharisees and their followers) among the Jews; though the sect of the Sadducees rejected it. But from whatever causes it had become thus prevalent (chiefly, no doubt, from those passages in the prophetic writings above alluded to), the belief actually entertained by the Jews is nothing to the present question; which is, not what *they held*, but what their *religion taught* them; not what their opinions might chance to be, but what was *revealed* to them in their law. And surely, whatever a man's conjectures may be on the subject, they can be *but conjectures*—there can be no

certain assurance of a resurrection—without divine revelation. As Dr. Paley remarks on this subject, "the doctrine was not *discovered;* it was only one *guess* among many; he only discovers, who *proves;* and this proof was furnished by Jesus Christ alone."

The same may be said of the ancient Heathens; they did but conjecture, without proof, respecting a future state. And there is this remarkable circumstance to be noticed in addition; that those who taught the doctrine (as the ancient heathen lawgivers themselves did, from a persuasion of its importance for men's conduct), do not seem themselves to have believed what they taught, but to have thought merely of the expediency of inculcating this belief on the vulgar.

It does not appear, however, that they had much success in impressing their doctrine on the mass of the people: for though a state of future rewards and punishments was commonly talked of among them, it seems to have been regarded as little more than an amusing fable. It does not appear, from the

account of their own writers, that men's lives were ever influenced by any such belief. On the contrary, we find them, in speeches publicly delivered and now extant, ridiculing the very notion of any one's seriously believing the doctrine. And when they found death seemingly unavoidable and near at hand, as in the case of a very destructive pestilence, we are told, that those of them who had been the most devout worshippers of their gods, and had applied to them with various superstitious ceremonies for deliverance from the plague, finding that the disease still raged, and that they had little chance of escaping it, at once cast off all thoughts of religion; and, resolving to enjoy life while it lasted, gave a loose to all their vicious inclinations. This shows, that even those who had the firmest faith in the power of their gods, looked to them for *temporal* deliverance only, and for their preservation in *this* life, and had not only no belief, but no suspicion even, that these Beings had any power to reward and punish beyond the grave;—that there was

any truth in the popular tales respecting a future state.*

It may be thought, however, by some, that the wisest of the heathen philosophers, though they did not hold the notions of the vulgar as to the particulars of a future state of rewards and punishments, yet had convinced themselves (as in their writings they profess) of the immortality of the soul. And it is true that they had, in a certain sense; but in such a sense as in fact makes the doctrine amount to nothing at all. They imagined that the souls of men, and of all other animals, were not created by God, but were themselves parts of the divine Mind, from which they were separated, when united with bodies; and to which they would return and be re-

* The lamentation of a Greek poet over his friend, which I subjoin, strikingly illustrates what I have been saying:—

"The meanest herb we trample in the field,
Or in the garden nurture, when its leaf
In Autumn dies, forebodes another Spring,
And from brief slumber wakes to life again:
Man wakes no more! Man, peerless, valiant, wise,
Once chill'd by death, sleeps hopeless in the dust,
A long, unbroken, never-ending sleep."

Moschus. Epit. Bion. translated by Gisbourne.

united, on quitting those bodies; so that the soul, according to this notion, was immortal both ways; that is, not only was to have no end, but had no beginning; and was to return after death into the same condition in which it was before our birth; a state without any distinct personal existence, or consciousness. It was the *substance of which the soul is composed*, that (according to this doctrine) was eternal, rather than the soul itself; which, as a distinct Being, was swallowed up and put an end to. Now it would be ridiculous to speak of any consolation, or any moral restraint, or any other effect whatever, springing from the belief of *such* a future state as this, which consists in becoming, after death, the same as we were before birth. To all practical purposes, it is the same thing as annihilation.

Accordingly the Apostle Paul, when speaking to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xv.) of some persons who denied the "*Resurrection* of the dead," (teaching, perhaps, some such doctrine as that I have just been speaking of,) declares, that in that case his "preaching would have been

vain." To deny the "*resurrection*" is, according to him, to represent Christians as "having hope *in this life only*," and those "who have fallen asleep in Christ as having *perished*." (v. 18, 19.) As for any such future existence as the ancient philosophers described, he does not consider it worth a thought.

Such was the boasted discovery of the heathen sages! which has misled many inattentive readers of their works; who, finding them often profess the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and not being aware what sort of immortality it was that they meant, have hastily concluded that they had discovered something approaching to the truth; or, at least, that their doctrine was one which might have some practical effect on the feelings and conduct; which, it is plain, it never could.* And such, very nearly, is said to be the belief entertained now by the learned among the East-Indian Bramins, though they teach a different doctrine to the vulgar.

* On the opinions of the ancient heathen philosophers, see note at the end of the Lecture.

It *was* then Jesus Christ, who brought "life and immortality to light," and founded the doctrine, not on ingenious philosophical arguments, nor on obscure traditions of which no one can tell the origin, but on the authority of his own assertions, established by the miracles He wrought, and especially by that splendid one, of rising Himself from the dead, as "the first-fruits of them that slept;"* to confirm his promise to his disciples that He would raise up also at the last day, his faithful followers.

On the nature of that future state which He then revealed and proved, and on some of the circumstances connected with the state of being we are to expect hereafter, I shall offer some remarks in the following Lectures.

For it is remarkable, that, interesting as the subject must needs be to all, and frequently as it must happen, that some

* That is, the first who rose from the dead, "to die no more." Lazarus, and the others, mentioned as raised from the dead before, were merely *restored* to life—to the natural *mortal* life on earth—which they had before enjoyed.

vague and indistinct thoughts respecting it flit through the mind of most Christians, yet there are very many, whose notions concerning a future state will be found, not only groundless, but even inconsistent with themselves, to such a degree, as to give proof that they can never have (properly speaking) reflected or inquired on the subject. I am not speaking of such as (for reasons easy to be guessed) do not *like* to think about the next life; but of those who profess to derive comfort from the thought, and yet whose ideas are so confused and contradictory, that it is plain how little they can have suffered their minds to dwell on it.

The subject is so hackneyed in the pulpit, that it is with difficulty a congregation can be brought to listen to it with interest; and yet (what is peculiarly perplexing to the preacher), though it wants the attraction of novelty, it has not the advantage of being fully impressed on the mind. Though trite, it is ill understood; and men are, in a certain sense, *familiar* with a doctrine, on which, nevertheless, they are usually *ignorant* and in need of in-

struction. Thoughts which are almost strangers to their mind, they yet find stale and wearisome.

And many persons again are perplexed as to the interpretation of certain passages of Scripture, or beset by some other distressing difficulties, in consequence of the notions they have formed respecting a future state; notions which they cannot perhaps reconcile with those passages of Scripture, or with the conclusions which Science has established: when, all the while, those notions are in fact no part of the *scripture*-doctrine of a future state, but have been founded merely on the bold assertions of uninspired men.

It will be my endeavour to set before you what *may* be known on the subject, in such a form as may (not perhaps extend, but) clear, and settle, and bring into a consistent shape, your notions of all the points connected with it. In the meanwhile I will conclude, by entreating you to examine each one his own heart, and question himself how far his thoughts are habitually engaged with the idea of another world, and of the preparation to be

made for it;—how far he *likes* or dislikes it as a matter of reflection; and how far his notions are (though *imperfect*, yet) consistent and intelligible.

You cannot for a moment doubt, that it is the most important of all the subjects that can occupy your thoughts, and *ought* to be the most interesting; and must, if it be not your own fault, prove the most cheering and comfortable. If, therefore, you find on examination, that it seldom comes across your mind, or seldom long remains in it: much more, if you find yourself apt to shun and drive it away—if you find your mind relieved and refreshed by turning away from the subject, and returning to the thoughts of this world;—or if the ideas on it which you have been used to entertain, and *contented* to entertain, are so confused and contradictory, as would, if distinctly stated in words, appear manifestly absurd to yourself, so as to indicate that you have not devoted your attention to it, nor employed the faculties of your mind on it; consider next, I beseech you, whether your mind can be in a sound or a safe

state, when you are thus averse or indifferent to so stupendous and so glorious a truth, or so contentedly ignorant on the most important subject that can engage your thoughts; and whether, while that is the case, you can entertain any just hopes of inheriting the promises of God, and attaining to "the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting," in his presence, in which you so often solemnly profess your belief.

Note.—Among the heathen philosophers, Plato has been appealed to, as having believed in a future state of reward and punishment, on the ground that the passages in his works in which he inculcates the doctrine are *much more numerous* than those in which he expresses his doubts of it. I cannot undertake to say that such is not the case; for this arithmetical mode (as it may be called) of ascertaining a writer's sentiments, by counting the passages on opposite sides, is one which had never occurred to me; nor do I think it is likely to be generally adopted. If, for instance, an author were to write ten volumes in defence of Christianity, and two or three times to express his suspicion that the whole is a tissue of fables, I believe few of his readers would feel any doubt as to his real sentiments. When a writer is at variance with himself, it is usual to judge from the nature of the subject, and the circumstances of the case, *which* is likely to be his real persuasion, and which, the one he may think it decorous, or politically expedient, to profess.

Now in the present case, if the ancient writers disbelieved a future state of reward and punishment, one can easily understand why they should nevertheless

occasionally speak as if they did believe it; since the doctrine, they all agreed, was useful in keeping the multitude in awe. On the other hand, would they, if they did believe in it, ever deny its truth? or rather (which is more commonly the case in their works) would they allude to it as a fable so notoriously and completely disbelieved by all enlightened people as not to be worth denying, much less refuting, any more than tales of fairies are by modern writers?

Even Aristotle has been appealed to as teaching (in the first book of the Nicomachean Ethics) the doctrine of a future state of enjoyment or suffering; though it is admitted by all, that, within a few pages, he speaks of death as the complete and final extinction of existence, "beyond which there is neither good nor evil to be expected." He does not even *assert* this as a thing to be proved, or which might be doubted; but *alludes* to it merely, as unquestioned and unquestionable. The other passage (in which he is supposed to speak of a state of consciousness after death) has been entirely mistaken by those who have so understood it. He expressly speaks of the dead, *in that very passage*, as "having *no* perception;" and all along proceeds on that supposition.

But many things *appear* good or evil to a person who has no perception of them at the time they exist. For example, many have undergone great toils for the sake of leaving behind them an illustrious name, or of bequeathing a large fortune to their children: almost every one dislikes the idea of having his character branded with infamy after his death; or of his children coming to poverty or disgrace: many are pleased with the thought of a splendid funeral and stately monuments; or of their bones reposing beside those of their forefathers, or of their beloved friends; and many dread the idea of their bodies being disinterred and dissected, or torn by dogs. Now no one, I suppose, would maintain that all who partake of such feelings, expect that they shall be conscious, at the

time, of what is befalling their bodies, their reputation, or their families, after death; much less, that they expect that their happiness will, at that time, be affected by it. In fact, such feelings as I have been speaking of, seem to have always prevailed, even the more strongly, in those who expected no future state.

It is of these posthumous occurrences that Aristotle is speaking, in the passage in question. But he expressly says, in that very passage, that "it would be *absurd* to speak of man's actually enjoying happiness after he is dead;" evidently proceeding (as he always does) on the supposition that the dead have ceased to exist.

I will add, what I think cannot but be interesting to some of my readers, two letters (as translated by Mr. Melmoth), one addressed to Cicero (a philosopher often appealed to as maintaining the soul's immortality) by his friend Sulpicius, to console him for the loss of a beloved daughter; and the other, Cicero's answer; each furnishing a melancholy and instructive comment on the Apostle's expression relative to the heathen "who sorrowed as having no hope." Gospel-light is so familiar to us, that we are apt not to value it as we ought, unless we now and then, by the help of imagination, transport ourselves for a few moments into Pagan darkness, and then the contrast strikes us.

SERVIUS SULPICIUS TO CICERO.

"I received the news of your daughter's death with all the concern it so justly deserves; and, indeed, I cannot but consider it is a misfortune in which I bear an equal share with yourself. If I had been near you when this fatal accident happened, I should not only have mingled my tears with yours, but assisted you with all the consolation in my power. I am sensible, at the same time, that offices of this kind afford, at best, but a wretched relief; for as none are qualified to perform them, but those who stand near to us by the ties either of blood or affection, such persons are

generally too much afflicted themselves to be capable of administering comfort to others. Nevertheless, I thought proper to suggest a few reflections which occurred to me upon this occasion: not as imagining they would be new to you, but believing that, in your present discomposure of mind, they might possibly have escaped your attention. Tell me then, my friend, wherefore do you indulge this excess of sorrow? Reflect, I entreat you, in what manner fortune has dealt with every one of us: that she has deprived us of what ought to be no less dear to us than our children, and overwhelmed, in one general ruin, our honours, our liberties, and our country. And, after these losses, is it possible that any other should increase our tears? Is it possible that a mind long exercised in calamities so truly severe, should not become totally callous and indifferent to every event? But you will tell me, perhaps, that your grief arises not so much on your own account as on that of Tullia. Yet, surely, you must often, as well as myself, have had occasion, in these wretched times, to reflect that their condition by no means deserves to be regretted, whom death has gently removed from this unhappy scene. What is there, let me ask, in the present circumstances of our country, that could have rendered life greatly desirable to your daughter? What pleasing hopes, what agreeable views, what rational satisfaction could she possibly have proposed to herself, from a more extended period? Was it in the prospect of conjugal happiness, in the society of some distinguished youth? as if, indeed, you could have found a son-in-law, amongst our present set of young men, worthy of being entrusted with the care of your daughter! Or was it in the expectation of being the joyful mother of a flourishing race, who might possess their patrimony with independence, who might gradually rise through the several dignities of the state, and exert the liberty to which they were born in the service and defence of their friends and country? But

is there one amongst all these desirable privileges, of which we were not deprived, before she was in a capacity of transmitting them to her descendants? Yet, after all, you may still allege, perhaps, that the loss of our children is a severe affliction; and unquestionably it would be so, if it were not a much greater to see them live to endure those indignities which their parents suffer.

"I lately fell into a reflection which, as it afforded great relief to the disquietude of my own heart, it may possibly contribute, likewise, to assuage the anguish of yours. In my return out of Asia, as I was sailing from Ægina* towards Megara, I amused myself with contemplating the circumjacent countries. Behind me lay Ægina, before me Megara; on my right I saw Piræeus,† and on my left Corinth.‡ These cities, once so flourishing and magnificent, now presented nothing to my view but a sad spectacle of desolation. 'Alas,' I said to myself, 'shall such a short-lived creature as man complain, when one of his species falls either by the hand of violence, or by the common course of nature; whilst in this narrow compass, so many great and glorious cities, formed for a much longer duration, thus lie extended in ruins? Remember then, oh my heart! the general lot to which man is born, and let that thought suppress thy unreasonable murmurs.' Believe me, I found my mind greatly refreshed and comforted by these reflections. Let me advise you, in the same manner, to represent to yourself what numbers§ of our illustrious countrymen have lately been cut off at once; how much the strength of the

* Ægina, now called Engia, is an island situated in the gulf that runs between Peloponnesus and Attica, to which it gives its name. Megara was a city near the isthmus of Corinth.

† Piræus, a celebrated sea-port at a small distance from Athens, now called Port-Lion.

‡ Corinth, a city in the Peloponnesus.

§ In the Civil Wars.

Roman republic is impaired, and what dreadful devastation has gone forth throughout all its provinces! And can you, with the impression of these greater calamities upon your mind, be so immoderately afflicted for the loss of a single individual, a poor, little, tender woman? who, if she had not died at this time, must, in a few fleeting years more, have inevitably undergone that common fate to which she was born.

"Reasonable, however, as these reflections are, I would call you from them awhile, in order to lead your thoughts to others more peculiarly suitable to your circumstances and character. Remember, then, that your daughter lived as long as life was worth possessing; that is, till liberty was no more; that she lived to see you in the illustrious office of prætor, consul, and augur; to be married* to some of the noblest youths in Rome; to be blessed with almost every valuable enjoyment; and at length, to expire with the republic itself. Tell me now, what is there in this view of her fate, that could give either her or yourself just reason to complain? In fine, do not forget that you are Cicero; the wise, the philosophical Cicero, who was wont to give advice to others; nor resemble those unskilful empirics, who at the same time that they pretend to be furnished with remedies for other men's disorders, are altogether incapable of finding a cure for their own. On the contrary, apply to your private use those judicious precepts you have administered to the public. Time necessarily weakens the strongest impressions of sorrow; but it would be a reproach to your character not to anticipate this its certain effect, by the force of your own good sense and judgment. If the dead retain any consciousness of what is here transacted, your daughter's affection, I am sure, was such, both to you and all her relations, that she can by no means desire you should abandon yourself to this excess of grief.

* To Piso, Crassipes, and Dolabella.

Restrain it then, I conjure you, for her sake, and for the sake of the rest of your family and friends, who lament to see you thus afflicted. Restrain it too, I beseech you, for the sake of your country; that whenever the opportunity shall serve, it may reap the benefit of your counsels and assistance. In short, since such is our fortune, that we must necessarily submit to the present system of public affairs; suffer it not to be suspected, that it is not so much the death of your daughter, as the fate of the republic, and the success of our victors, that you deplore.

"But it would be ill manners to dwell any longer upon the subject, as I should seem to question the efficacy of your own good sense. I will only add, therefore, that as we have often seen you bear prosperity in the noblest manner, and with the highest applause; show us, likewise, that you are not too sensible of adversity, but know how to support it with the same advantage to your character. In a word, let it not be said, that fortitude is the single virtue to which my friend is a stranger.

"As for what concerns myself, I will send you an account of the state of this province, and of what is transacting in this part of the world, as soon as I shall hear that you are sufficiently composed to receive the information. Farewell."

To Servius Sulpicius.

"I join with you, my dear Sulpicius, in wishing that you had been in Rome when this most severe calamity befel me. I am sensible of the advantage I should have received from your presence, and I had almost said your equal participation of my grief, by having found myself somewhat more composed after I had read your letter. It furnished me, indeed, with arguments extremely proper to soothe the anguish of affliction; and evidently flowed from a heart that sympathized with the sorrows it endeavoured to assuage. But, although I could not enjoy the benefit of your own good offices in person, I had

the advantage however of your son's; who gave me a proof, by every tender assistance that could be contributed upon so melancholy an occasion, how much he imagined that he was acting agreeably to your sentiments when he thus discovered the affection of his own. More pleasing instances of his friendship, I have frequently received; but never any that were more obliging. As to those for which I am indebted to yourself, it is not only the force of your reasonings, and the very considerable share you take in my afflictions, that have contributed to compose my mind; it is the deference, likewise, which I always pay to the authority of your sentiments. For knowing, as I perfectly do, the superior wisdom with which you are enlightened, I should be ashamed not to support my distresses in the manner you think I ought. I will acknowledge, nevertheless, that they sometimes almost entirely overcome me; and I am scarce able to resist the force of my grief when I reflect, that I am destitute of those consolations which attended others whose examples I propose to my imitation. Thus Quintus Maximus lost a son of consular rank, and distinguished by many brave and illustrious actions; Lucius Paulus was deprived of two sons in the space of a single week; and your relation Gallus, together with Marcus Cato, had both of them the unhappiness to survive their respective sons, who were endowed with the highest abilities and virtues. Yet these unfortunate parents lived in times when the honours they derived from the republic might, in some measure, alleviate the weight of their domestic misfortunes. But as for myself, after having been stripped of those dignities you mention, and which I had acquired by the most laborious exertion of my abilities, I had one only consolation remaining; and of that I am now bereaved! I could no longer divert the disquietude of my thoughts, by employing myself in the causes of my friends, or the business of the state; for I could no longer, with any satisfaction, appear either in the forum or the senate. In short, I justly considered myself as cut off from the

benefit of all those alleviating occupations in which fortune and industry had qualified me to engage. But I considered, too, that this was a deprivation which I suffered in common with yourself and some others; and whilst I was endeavouring to reconcile my mind to a patient endurance of those ills, there was *one* to whose tender offices I could have recourse, and in the sweetness of whose conversation I could discharge all the cares and anxiety of my heart. But this last fatal stab to my peace has torn open those wounds which seemed in some measure to have been tolerably healed. For I can now no longer lose my private sorrows in the prosperity of the commonwealth; as I was wont to dispel the uneasiness I suffered upon the public account, in the happiness I received at home. Accordingly, I have equally banished myself from my house,* and from the public; as finding no relief in either, from the calamities I lament in both. It is this, therefore, that heightens my desire of seeing you here; as nothing can afford me a more effectual consolation than the renewal of our friendly intercourse; a happiness, which I hope, and am informed indeed, that I shall shortly enjoy. Among the many reasons I have for impatiently wishing your arrival, one is, that we may previously concert together our scheme of conduct in the present conjuncture; which, however, must now be entirely accommodated to another's will. This person,† it is true, is a man of great abilities and generosity; and one, if I mistake not, who is by no means my enemy; as I am sure he is extremely your friend. Nevertheless, it requires much consideration, I do not say in what manner we shall act with respect to public affairs, but by what methods we may best obtain his permission to retire from them. Farewell."

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* Cicero, upon the death of his daughter, retired from his own house, to one belonging to Atticus, near Rome, from which perhaps this letter was written.

† Cæsar.

LECTURE II.

General Considerations on the Intermediate State.

A FUTURE state which is to last for ever, every one must allow to be in itself, a subject the most awfully interesting that can be presented to the mind of man. Many a person is conscious indeed that other subjects do, in general, interest him much more; yet every one must be also conscious that in point of *real* importance, all other subjects are comparatively trifles to us. I say to *us*, because, though other matters of contemplation may be no less sublime and wonderful, none of them can so closely come home to ourselves. Admirable as are the works of creation, the whole of it, even if we could understand the whole, could contain nothing so interesting to *us*, as ourselves, and our own eternal existence hereafter.

And yet (as I remarked in my last Lecture) there is hardly any subject on which it is so difficult to keep the attention awake; because, imperfect and erroneous as men's notions on it commonly are, it has lost all the attraction of novelty; and they grow weary of it, even before they understand as much concerning it as *may* be understood.

Sometimes one who feels, and regrets in himself this deadness of mind and indifference to such a subject, may rouse his attention to it, for a time at least, by turning his thoughts to the death of some friend or well-known neighbour, which may have taken place not long before. The consolations afforded by Scripture to the survivors who are mourning any such loss, will then naturally present themselves; as, for example, that offered by the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians; "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as the rest,* who have no hope. For if we be-

* The word in the original, which our translators have rendered "others," means, properly, "the rest;"

lieve that Jesus died and rose again, even so also them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."* (1 Thess. vi. 13, 14.) And this may be made to lead to a train of meditations on the subject, such as these: "the time will certainly come when no subject but this will interest me at all: after I shall have left this world, and perhaps all my descendants to the last generation shall long have followed me, I shall *still* be living; and, ages after that, shall have as much life to look forward to as ever; being in that state of existence which is to have no end;—I shall still be

that is, the rest of the Gentiles;—the unbelieving idolaters amongst whom they lived.

It is worth observing, that the Apostle says of these, not merely that they had no *good grounds* for hope of a future life, but that they absolutely *had* no such hope; and accordingly "sorrowed" for their departed friends as for those who were to live no more. The tales of the heathen poets, therefore, and the speculations of their philosophers, about a future state of rewards and punishments, seem to have produced (if Paul is to be believed, who is likely to have known better how the case really stood than we can) no expectation at all in the hearer's mind, of any such life to come.

* The exact translation of this last clause is, "those also who are asleep, will God, through Jesus, bring with Him;" that is, with Jesus Himself. The words of the original will not bear the sense of "sleep in Jesus."

as capable of enjoyment and of suffering as now, and probably much more so; I shall be occupied entirely with the objects and concerns of that other life, to which *this* is less than a drop of water compared with the ocean; and regarding the affairs of what will *then* be my former state, as of no consequence at all, excepting as they shall have affected my eternal condition."

And then you may perhaps contrive to detain your mind the longer on this course of meditation, and to return to it the oftener by entering on the consideration of several *particular points*, one by one, that are connected with the subject; and which are what I propose to discuss separately and leisurely in the following Lectures.

I do not, however, mean to hold out the expectation that these discussions (or indeed all that are to be found in all the books that are extant) will leave you satisfied that you are well acquainted with the subject, or even contented with your own state of feelings respecting it,—with the degree of interest you take in the

things of the other world. On the contrary, I have always found, as I dare say you will, that the more I enquire into these matters, by examining the Scriptures, and reasoning from them, even when I have succeeded in ascertaining some points, the more I am struck with the reflection how vast is the extent of man's ignorance on this awful and mysterious subject, and how unequal are his faculties, in the present state, to the full comprehension of it. And the more I endeavour (and even endeavour with some success) to fix my thoughts on the life to come, with something of that intense interest which it undeniably deserves, the more conscious I am how far my feelings fall short in liveliness and strength, of being proportioned to the importance of the subject. But still the contemplation of it will afford you, I trust, both gratification and profit. The higher you ascend in knowledge and in feeling, the more you will be struck with the stupendous distance above you (as travellers have found in climbing some of the greatest mountains) of that summit which you are not

to reach in this life. But you will not therefore regret that you have ascended at all: it will be both pleasurable, and in the highest degree improving, to have advanced perceptibly nearer to a point which, in our present state, we cannot completely attain.

And do not suppose that, provided you see no particular ground for *alarm* respecting the future, you need not think about it;—that, provided you are not conscious of living a life of sin, you may rest in unthinking security, and not trouble yourself with meditating about the next life till you are on the point of departing from this. Be assured, on the contrary, that an aversion or an indifference to thinking of the next life, is of itself a proof that you are *not* in a sound or safe state of mind. For is any one contented who has nothing to hope for?—no object to look forward to? Is it not the very nature of man to dwell with delight on the expectation of any good which is likely to befall him, even when it is something quite independent of his own exertions;—some event which it is not in his power to

secure or to hasten, and on which his reflections are but a mere unprofitable amusement of the mind? Now, here is an object set before us, far more interesting and important than all others put together; and an object, too, which it does depend on us to secure. If, then, you have a well-grounded hope that your future state will be a happy one (and happy it must be, to an unspeakable degree, if you escape condemnation in the great day of account), is it not natural,—so much as the human mind delights in hope,—that you should cherish and continually dwell upon this brightest of hopes with ever-new delight, and derive daily comfort from the thought, more than from all other thoughts? If on the contrary, you are doubtful whether your hopes *are* well-founded,—or if your prospects of a future life are alarming,—it is high time for reflection on it; which, however disagreeable, you must be sure is the more necessary. You cannot avoid the danger by shutting your eyes to it; nor defer it by deferring the thoughts of it; though you *may* prevent it by timely care. And

since, hereafter, the life that is now future *must* occupy *all* your thoughts, whether you will or not, when it will be too late to alter your condition in it, let some of your thoughts be engaged in it now, while they may be turned to a profitable purpose.

One of the chief difficulties of properly fixing the thoughts on this awful subject, is (what I have hinted at already), that the idea of immortal existence is too vast to be, in any degree, at once embraced by the mind; so that we are apt to underrate the object, from the very circumstance of its immensity; and to form but a vague and uninteresting notion of what we cannot take in at a single glance. It is the same even with objects of sight. All, for instance, who have visited any very stupendous mountain, agree, that at the first view, their ideas fall far short of the reality: because they cannot at first duly measure it with the eye. But gradually, as they take a closer view of the several *parts* of it, and especially when they contemplate it from the top of some lower mountain, and observe it still towering

above them, their ideas enlarge, and they form a juster notion of the vastness of the object before them. And in like manner, by dwelling separately on each of the several circumstances connected with the magnificent prospect of the world to come, our notions will gradually become more distinct, and more suited to the sublimity of the subject.

In the last Lecture, accordingly, I confined my attention to the first discovery of a future state; which was indeed imperfectly guessed at, though not (properly speaking) *discovered*, in earlier times; but the *knowledge* of which (for *conjecture* is *not* knowledge) was "brought to light" and revealed to mankind, as the Apostle Paul assures us, by Jesus Christ.

Our Lord's account, however (as well as that of his apostles), of a future life, though most clear and positive as to the *fact*, is so scanty and imperfect as to the *circumstances*, that our curiosity is rather awakened than satisfied. We are told, indeed, as much as is sufficient for our practical use, when we have the certain assurance of future rewards and punish-

ments, and the means set before us by which immortal life may be secured; but we are not told by any means all that we might naturally wish to know. Much is withheld from us; doubtless for good reasons; but for reasons which we cannot always fully perceive, though we may sometimes in part guess at them.

For instance, we are not expressly told anywhere in Scripture what becomes of a man immediately after death, during the interval between that and the final resurrection at the last day. There are some persons, indeed, who pronounce very confidently on this point; but without, I think, any sufficient grounds for that confidence. It is a more prudent, and humbler, and safer course, not to pretend to be wise above what is written, nor to know what our great Master has not thought fit to teach. To abstain from positive assertions where there is no good foundation for them, may be, to some of my readers, unsatisfactory; but surely doubt is better than error, or the chance of error; and acknowledged ignorance is wiser than groundless presumption. Con-

jectures, indeed, if cautiously and reverently framed, *may* be allowed, in a case where there is no certain knowledge; but I dare not speak *positively* when the Scriptures do not.

Thus much, then, seems taught with sufficient clearness in Scripture; in the first place, that we are designed, every one of us (of us, at least, who have heard the Gospel), in some state or other, to continue to exist after death;—that though our condition will undergo more than one change, our existence will not come to an end at the close of our life on earth. I say "*more than one change*," because (in the second place) we know that, to much the greater part of mankind (to all, that is, excepting those that shall be alive on the earth at the time of their Lord's coming to judgment), there must be two changes; first the act of passing from this present life to the state, whatever it is, which immediately succeeds it; and another, from that state to the one which is to take place at the resurrection. These, it is evident, must be two very different states, because, we see the body after death lie senseless, and moulder into dust; and we

know from Scripture that at the final resurrection, at the great day of judgment, we shall again have bodies.

And here it may be worth while to notice one of the prevailing inconsistencies of language, formerly alluded to, respecting this point: it is common to hear persons when speaking of those of the departed, of whose final salvation they are confident, speak of them as in *heaven*,—as admitted to that blissful state in which they are to continue for ever,—as *made* partakers of the kingdom of heaven, &c. And yet you are expressly told in Scripture, and profess it among the articles of your belief, that it is *at the end of the world*, that Jesus Christ will come to judge all men, and pronounce their final doom;—and *then*, and not *before*, there will be a resurrection from the dead ("I will raise him up *at the last day*," John vi. 54), and that each will *then* have his just portion assigned him, whether of reward or punishment. Matt. xxv. 31—46. Now this belief is manifestly in contradiction to the language I have just been alluding to. It may be believed without an incon-

sistency that those who have departed "in the Lord," are in the enjoyment of some kind of happiness; but to speak of them as *having entered upon* their final condition of heavenly bliss, is at least a very inaccurate mode of speaking.

But what then (it may be asked) *is* this intermediate state, in which a man exists, from the time of his death till that of the final resurrection? This is a question which it is much more natural to ask, than easy to answer decisively; but (in the third place) we know certainly, this important point, that whatever this state may be, it is *not*, as far as Scripture teaches us, a state of trial,—not a state in which we can work out our salvation; or in which anything can be done to further or to hinder it. That this world, and this life, are the only place and time appointed for the discipline, and trial, and preparation, at least of us who have heard the Gospel, is what we are plainly taught by the Sacred Writers. Long after their time, a groundless notion gradually crept into the Church in days of ignorant superstition, concerning an intermediate state

of purification of souls by suffering, thence called Purgatory: from which they might be delivered through the prayers of survivors.* This superstition, as it became a source of profit was encouraged and sanctioned by those who ought to have taught the people better. It is manifestly a presumptuous addition to the christian Faith; for not only is there no ground for any such doctrine in Holy Scripture, but on the contrary, the Scriptures afford us in many places the most convincing proofs that this life is the whole of our state of probation,—that sentence will be pronounced on every man, according to his life here on earth,—"his deeds *done in the flesh*;"—and that nothing can take place after his death that can at all affect his future condition.

Since, then, the intermediate state is not one of *trial* or *preparation*, it must either be a state of enjoyment and of suffering,

* It may be remarked, by the way, that if this purification or purgatory be a *necessary preparation* to fit men for entering on a state of heavenly happiness, it would be both foolish and wrong to *pray* that they should be *removed* from it.

respectively, to the faithful and the disobedient (in other words, a state of reward and punishment), or else a state of perfect insensibility—a profound sleep.

The authors of our Church-Services, at least of the Burial-Service, seem to have adopted the former of these opinions: though they have nowhere insisted on it as an article of faith; nor is the point noticed at all in the creed (or symbol) of our Church, which the Reformers of it drew up, and which is usually called the Thirty-nine Articles. Indeed, in the Burial-Service itself, there is an expression (in which, adopting the Apostle's expression, they speak of the dead as "those that are *asleep*"*) which, in its most obvious and natural sense, favours the other supposition.

Each of the two opinions, however, has been held by able and pious men: and I am convinced that a person may be blameless in point of faith, whichever of them he inclines to, provided he do not

* On the application of the word "sleeping" to the dead, I shall offer some remarks in one of the following Lectures.

speak too positively on so obscure a point, or demand the assent of others, where the Scriptures do not speak, or, at least, do not speak decidedly.

I will set before you, in the next two Lectures, some of the arguments which have been, or may be, employed on each side; and if they should not enable us to arrive at any positive conclusion, we may at least point out and avoid any manifestly mistaken notions, and ascertain how much *may*, and how much *cannot*, be pronounced upon; and partly, perhaps, perceive for what reasons God has thought fit to reveal no more to us on these points.

Where certain knowledge cannot be attained, it is no small matter to know the extent of our own ignorance; and the next best thing to understanding the whole of any subject is, to be aware of what we do *not* understand. Remember, however, that even in this life we know enough to fill us with overpowering wonder,—with care and thoughtfulness about the other world,—with the keenest apprehensions,—with the most sublime hopes; and that we know enough to en-

lighten and to guide us in this life, if we will but bring our knowledge into practice. Hereafter we shall doubtless know much more; but the time for profiting by that knowledge will then be past.* Our present *uncertainty* is that which constitutes our *trial*; which will be over, when that uncertainty is removed. "Walk, therefore, circumspectly" in the faint twilight now bestowed; remembering that when *that* shall be succeeded by the broad daylight of the resurrection, our course of trial will have been finished; and our condition settled for ever.

* And what if much be still unknown?
Thy Lord will teach thee that,
When thou shalt stand before his throne,
Or sit as Mary sat.

Wait till He shall Himself disclose
Things now beyond thy reach;
But listen not, my child, to those
Who the Lord's secrets teach;

Who teach thee more than He has taught,
Tell more than He reveal'd;
Preach tidings which He never brought,
And read what He left seal'd.

Hinds's Poems.

LECTURE III.

Reasons for supposing the Intermediate State one of Consciousness.

It appears to have been a belief or suspicion entertained by several of the earliest Christians that the end of the world was just at hand; which opinion was probably founded on a misinterpretation of our Lord's prophecies respecting the judgment about to be executed on Jerusalem; which in a certain sense was called "the coming of the Lord;" and which "coming" they confounded with his final coming to judge the world; a mistake the more natural, because He himself did at the same time prophesy concerning his final coming likewise; so that what related to the one and to the other of these two events, was in some degree mixed and blended together.*

* See Hinds's "History of the Rise and Early Progress of Christianity," for some remarks on these pro-

The Thessalonians, moreover, seem to have had an idea, that some advantages would be possessed by those of them who should be alive at the coming of Jesus Christ, over those who had died before it; and that these would be admitted to some higher privileges; which of course increased their sorrow for their friends who were departed. This occasioned the Apostle Paul to assure them, that all Christians who had continued in the faith and fear of God, should be partakers of the same blessings, whether they should be living or dead, when the Day of Judgment should arrive, and should enter upon the enjoyment of those blessings at the very same time; that those "who are alive shall not prevent" (that is, precede or be beforehand with) those of the faithful who are in the grave; but that "the dead in Christ shall rise first;" that is, the *first thing* in order of time will be, that the *dead* in Christ shall rise, and shall be admitted into the presence of the Lord, together with those that are still living.

phecies of our Lord; and also his "Catechist's Manual," on the same subject.

This is sufficient to afford comfort to all who have a lively faith in God's promises; both of the Thessalonians and of all other Christians in every age and country: with this the Apostle is contented; it being generally the practice of the Sacred Writers to reveal that the most distinctly which it is of the greatest practical importance to know; and to speak less frequently and more obscurely of matters, on which, however interesting to our curiosity, we may safely remain in ignorance or in doubt, during our time of trial here on earth.

The Apostle accordingly, though he has said enough to encourage his disciples not to sorrow as men without hope for their deceased brethren, gives no account of the intermediate state which was alluded to in my last Lecture; that state, in which men remain from death till the final resurrection. He merely tells them, that as "Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep will God, through Jesus, bring with Him."*

And this (the intermediate state) is a

* See l. ii. p. 36.

point on which, I think, nothing is so clearly revealed in any part of Scripture as to allow us to pronounce positively that such and such a belief respecting it is to be held as an essential part of the christian Faith; since, if such had been the design of the Almighty, I cannot but think there would have been some explicit and decisive revelation given on that point.

One thing, however, (I remarked to you,) is perfectly clear and certain respecting what that intermediate state *is not;* namely, that it is *not* a state of trial and probation,—a state in which anything can take place (through any prayers or pretended sacrifices offered up by survivors) to affect a man's final condition; since we are plainly taught in Scripture that this present life is the *whole* of our state of trial, and that we shall be judged at the last day according to our conduct here on earth.

Since, then, the intermediate state is not one of trial, it must be either one of enjoyment and suffering according to each man's character (that is, a state of reward and punishment), or else a state of utter

insensibility and unconsciousness; either of which opinions may, I think, be safely entertained (though only one of them can be true), without failing in any part of the faith which it is essential for a Christian to hold.

It may be interesting, however, to lay before you some of the reasons which are urged in behalf of each of these opinions; that you may be prepared to do justice to the maintainers both of the one and the other, and that you may perceive how perfectly each supposition accords with what are the essential parts of our faith on this point; namely, a due sense of the immense value of this life considered as a preparation for eternity,—and the fullest confidence in the promises and threatenings of God with respect to the life to come.

Those, then, who believe that the soul, when separated from the body by death, retains its activity, and consciousness, and sensibility to pleasure and pain, and that it enters immediately on a state of enjoyment or of suffering, appeal to se-

veral passages of Scripture, which appear to favour this doctrine, though without expressly declaring it: among which is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus; the former of whom is represented as being in a state of torment: although the end of the world is plainly supposed not to have arrived, since he is described as entreating Lazarus to warn his surviving brethren, "lest they also come into this place of torment."

And if all that is here told were to be considered as a narrative of a matter of fact which actually took place, it would be perfectly decisive. But all allow that the narrative is a *parable*, that is, a fictitious tale framed in order to teach or illustrate some doctrine: and although such a tale *may* chance to agree in every point with matter of fact,—with events which actually take place,—there is no necessity that it should. The only truth that is essential in a parable, is the truth of the moral or doctrine conveyed by it. Many accordingly of our Lord's parables are not—though many are—exactly correspondent with facts which actually occur. For instance, in the parable

of the sower, the account of the different success of the seed which fell on the trodden way-side, in the rocky ground, among thorns, and on good land, agrees literally with what actually takes place daily; though no particular sower is intended, even here: the object is to illustrate the different reception of the Gospel by men of different characters. On the other hand, in the parable of the good Samaritan,—in that of the king who destroyed the ungrateful guests who refused to come to his feast,—of the husbandmen who killed the servants and the son of the lord of the vineyard,—and in many others,—there is no reason to believe that any such events did ever actually take place; it is enough for the object of the parable, that it is *conceivable* they *might* take place; and that we should be able to derive instruction from considering how men *would be likely* to act, or how they *ought* to act, *supposing* such circumstances *should* actually occur.

The parable therefore of the rich man and Lazarus, is not, I think, decisive of the point in question. It seems to imply

indeed, very plainly, that there is a future state of reward and punishment (a doctrine, however, which most of Christ's hearers had no doubt of); and also that those who have been devoted to the good things and enjoyments of this world, will have no share in those of the world to come, and will regret, when it is too late, their not having "laid up for themselves treasure in heaven."* This appears to have been the general moral design of the parable; in the detail of which, many things are spoken figuratively, to give force and liveliness to the description, which are plain enough *when figuratively* understood, but could not have been meant, of course, to be taken literally; as, for instance, where the rich man is represented as holding discourse with Abraham, and entreating a drop of water

* It has been supposed, and I have no doubt with reason, that there is also another meaning, more appropriate to the Gospel-scheme, in this parable; that the rich man represents the Jews, originally God's "peculiar people," and Lazarus, the despised Gentiles, who were afterwards admitted to "sit down with *Abraham*, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." This however does not concern the present question.

to cool his tongue, because he is tormented in flames: which is a lively figurative description of the future misery of the wicked, and is so employed by our Lord in other places: all which corresponds exactly with what *would* be said and done *supposing* such circumstances actually and literally to occur; but does not imply that the fact is literally such as the parable describes. Indeed the very circumstance of the torturing *flames*, implies, literally, the presence of the *body*; and therefore cannot be literally true of a state in which the soul is *separate* from the body.

It may be said that as our Lord must have known what is the actual state of the departed, He might have been expected, on such an occasion as this, to reveal it. That he did *not*, however, in fact, give a literally true account of this state, is plain from what has been just said: nor does it appear to have been his design, generally, to reveal all that He was able to reveal.

The same view, I think, may be taken of the vision presented to the Apostle John (in the Revelations) of the souls of

those who had suffered martyrdom for the Christian faith, calling upon God to avenge his Church, even as the blood of Abel is said, in Genesis, to cry to the Lord. We may collect from this, that a notice was intended to be given to John of the severe and bloody persecutions of the Christians, which took place not very long after,—and an assurance that God would give deliverance to his Church, and that those who had suffered in the cause of Christ should be highly exalted and everlastingly rewarded by Him. But many of the circumstances of the vision are evidently such as can only be understood figuratively; such as the *white robes* of the martyrs, which denote their being justified and accounted pure before God through the blood of Christ. So that I think we cannot from this passage conclude with any certainty that these martyrs, or any other Christians, enter into a state of reward or punishment immediately after death. Indeed if it were but recollected that nothing but *material, bodily*, substance can be an object of *sight*, it would be plain that all the passages in

which a departed soul is spoken of as *appearing to the eyes*, so far from proving even the existence of a soul in a *separate* state from the body, and unconnected with any material substance, would, if they were to be understood literally, prove the direct contrary,—that the persons so spoken of as visibly appearing, actually *had* bodies at the time.*

Again, the transfiguration on the mount, in which Moses and Elias appear talking with Jesus, may be brought forward as an argument for the supposition of a state of sense and consciousness after death before the final resurrection; Moses and Elias having departed long before. But

* It is remarkable that a great part of mankind, and those not least, who profess to hold, not only the distinct nature of the soul from any material substance, but even its power of continuing active and conscious when disunited from matter, are nevertheless altogether *materialists*, and mean by a *spirit*, only some thin and delicate kind of matter, like a cloud or a ray of light, &c., which is an object of the senses, but not of *all* the senses. This is plainly the case, not only with those who believe in the common stories of ghosts (that is, spirits) *appearing* and speaking; but also with those who, though they disbelieve these accounts, yet perceive nothing *contradictory* and inconceivable in the idea of the *appearing of a spirit*; which of course would be to them mere words without meaning, if they understood

nothing generally decisive can be concluded from any case which is manifestly an *exception* to general rules; as this was, in every respect. The prophet Elijah (or Elias), we know, did not die at all; but was visibly, in his bodily state, taken from the earth; and in the case of Moses also, a prophet still more highly favoured of God, there appears to have been something peculiar as to his departure; for we are told indeed that he died, and was buried in the land of Moab, but that "*no man knew of his sepulchre.*" Whether he also, like Elijah, and like Enoch, was permitted to forestall the general resurrection, we cannot tell; but it seems clear (as I

by "spirit" something which does not consist of matter, and consequently cannot have (as a visible object must) shape, height, colour, &c.

Whatever is actually seen, or presented to any of the senses, whether naturally or supernaturally, must of course be material; but a like *effect* may be produced on the *mind* (as we experience in the case of imagination and dreaming, and, as we read, in the case of visions) without the presence (as far as we know) of any material object. And the inaccuracy of common language, when we are speaking of such things, perhaps tends to confuse our thoughts. Thus we say, indifferently, "I *saw* in my sleep this or that," or "I dreamed that I saw it:" the former expression, interpreted literally, would imply the presence of a material object; the latter, not.

lately observed to you) that the soul separate from the body is not an object of *sight* (since at a man's death, all that was formerly visible of him remains before our eyes in the corpse); so that nothing can be inferred respecting a *separate* state of the soul, from the *visible* appearance of Moses and Elias, which the eyes of the Apostles witnessed.

It is to be observed also, that there can be little doubt the appearance of Moses and Elias on this occasion was designed to represent "the Law" (delivered by Moses) "and the Prophets," of whom Elias was especially venerated; and that their appearing in friendly communing with Jesus, denoted the agreement of his Gospel with the Law and the Prophets, which He "came not to destroy, but to fulfil." This was the lesson which the appearance conveyed to the disciples; and the *appearance* alone is all that concerned them, or that concerns us. The actual condition of the persons themselves, is a point which did not concern them. Every thing, indeed, that is recorded in the Gospel-history, is to be considered in re-

ference to the *instruction* it was designed to convey to the disciples: "this voice," said our Lord (of that which then came from heaven, announcing Him as the "Beloved Son of God"), "came not because of me, but for *your* sakes."

The promise of our Lord to the thief* [robber] on the Cross, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," has been urged with more reason, in favour of the opinion that man passes from death at once into a state of enjoyment or of suffering. But this also is a very peculiar case; and therefore can hardly be regarded as decisive as to what shall be the lot of other men. I mean, supposing the promise to be understood in the literal sense of the word *to-day*; which, as I shall show hereafter, is not absolutely necessary. I shall dwell at large in another Lecture (the 11th) on the remarkable circumstances (often overlooked) which made the dying robber's profession of faith most distinguished and eminent;—his acknowledging

* In old English (as may be seen in some of the Ballads), the word "thief" was used to signify what we now call "robber," or "bandit."

as his *King*, *that* Jesus who was at the very moment expiring on the Cross, when all his own disciples had fled in despair; —his being the *first*, probably, who ever perceived and acknowledged the true nature of Christ's kingdom, as being one into which He should enter *by suffering;*— his being the *only* one who ever did confess this faith before the resurrection. *His* faith, therefore, was most peculiar and pre-eminent. And so also was the period of his death, at the very time of the mighty sacrifice of the Son of God; which was accompanied with many miraculous circumstances, and among others, by the resurrection (as the Evangelist informs us) of the bodies of several holy men, who came out of their graves, and "entered into the holy city (Jerusalem) after the resurrection, and appeared unto many:" a kind of event which no one expects will take place with Christians in general before the Day of Judgment.

Whether the immediate admission into Paradise* of the penitent robber, supposing

* There was something remarkable and seemingly peculiar in the very promise itself which was made to

this to be understood literally, is to be regarded as one of the miraculous and extraordinary circumstances of that awful period, and consequently different from what takes place in other cases, or whether the same will be the lot of all Christ's faithful servants immediately on their departing this life; we are not, I think, authorized by that portion of the sacred history positively to pronounce.*

The passage in the first Epistle of Peter, about our Lord's "preaching to the spirits in prison," has been supposed to allude not only to the conscious state of departed spirits, but even to Christ's having visited, in the interval between his death and resurrection, the souls of those who perished in Noah's flood. But this seems to me a very unlikely inter-

this man. The full purport of it, we cannot, I think, positively determine. If the "Paradise," into which he was promised immediate admittance, be the place in which "just men made perfect," will, after the day of judgment, dwell for "ever with the Lord,"—or if it be the place or state into which good Christians pass immediately after death,—it is remarkable that the word Paradise is not the one commonly used in Scripture to convey either of those meanings.

* See note A. at the end of this Lecture.

pretation. The passage is indeed extremely obscure; and I have seen no explanation of it that is free from objection; but I will subjoin that which seems to me the most probable.*

I shall resume the consideration of the general question in a future Lecture; in which, though I may not be able to set before you anything decisively convincing and satisfactory as to the point now immediately before us (which is certainly interesting to our curiosity, though not essential to a saving faith), yet I shall not have occupied your time unprofitably, if I shall but have drawn off your thoughts in any degree from the cares and concerns of the world in which we live; which being present, and the object of our senses, generally occupies far the greater part of our attention; though in comparison of that world to come, which can be viewed only with the eye of faith, it is but as a grain of sand placed beside a mountain; "For the things which are seen are *temporal*, but the things which *are not seen* are *eternal*."

* See note B. at the end of this Lecture.

Note A.—The passage (Matt. x. 28) "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," &c., I had not adverted to, from not supposing it to have any connexion with the present subject; nor can I now perceive any; but as the learned Whitby, in his extreme anxiety to prove from Scripture a separate state of consciousness, has in his Commentary so applied this text, it is due to such an authority briefly to mention it. He does not seem, however, to have written in this place with his usual judgment.

The expression of Jesus to his disciples was manifestly intended to remind them that their enemies could only inflict temporal death,—could only put an end to a man's life in this world; whereas God's power extends to the whole of our existence,—to all eternity:—in the next world as well as in this. The question about the intermediate condition between death and the resurrection, evidently was not at all in his mind. But Whitby imagines Him to imply that the soul never can be in an unconscious state, because then it would be killed; "for," says he, "'tis not easie to perceive how an intelligent, thinking, and perceiving Being can be more killed than by depriving it of all sensation, thought, and perception." He did not recollect that it is a thing of every day's occurrence for a man to receive, for instance, a stunning blow, which for some minutes deprives him of all sensation, &c., though he afterwards recovers; yet we should not say that the person inflicting such a blow had killed the other's soul, any more than to leave him in the dark for some time would be the same thing as to destroy his eyes. But Whitby does not in general reason in this manner.

Note B.—"By the power of which divine Spirit of his, long before his manifestation in the flesh, He came to the old world; and by the mouth of Noah, that 'preacher of righteousness,' spake to them whose spirits are now fast prisoned in hell; which were in their lifetime wicked and disobedient to his holy counsels; when

the patient long-suffering of God gave a large respite to them for their repentance and conversion, even all the while that the ark was preparing by Noah."—*Bp. Hall.*

"'The spirits in prison,' to whom St. Peter saith, that Christ 'by his Spirit preached,' he saith also were those 'which were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah.' And therefore Christ's 'preaching to them by his Spirit' probably means, his exciting by his Spirit, which 'strove' with them for a time, Gen. vi. 3, that patriarch to be 'a preacher of righteousness' among them, as the same Apostle in his other Epistle calls him, 2 Pet. ii. 5. But not hearkening to him *then*, they are *now* in prison, reserved for the sentence of the last day."—*Abp. Secker.*

"The plain interpretation of this passage is the true one, namely, that Christ did preach unto those men who lived before the flood, even while they lived, and consequently that He was before it. For though this was not done by an immediate act of the Son of God, as if He personally had appeared on earth, and actually preached to that old world; but by the ministry of a Prophet, by the sending of Noah, a 'preacher of righteousness;' yet to do anything by another, not able to perform it without Him, as much demonstrates the existence of the principal cause, as if He did it of Himself without any intervening instrument."—*Bp. Pearson.*

LECTURE IV.

Arguments for the Insensibility of the Soul in the Intermediate State: and Reasons for concluding that the Question was purposely left undecided by Revelation.

THE error alluded to by the Apostle Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians (ch. xv. ver. 17), "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" seems to have prevailed, not only at Corinth, but also in the Churches of Asia; as appears from his second Epistle to Timothy, in which he particularizes Hymenæus and Philetus, as among the leaders of the sect, whose doctrine was, that the resurrection was past already. They took hold, it seems, of those figurative expressions of our Lord and his Apostles, in which they speak of the change in a converted Christian, under the figure of a "death unto sin,"—of

being "buried with Christ"—"putting on the new man"—and being "risen with Christ," to a new life of conformity to his example, &c.; and inferred from these expressions that *no other* resurrection was to be expected, and that consequently, to all who had become sincere Christians, it was "past already." And this Paul designates as a "blasphemous doctrine, overthrowing the Faith;" inasmuch as it leads, he says, to the denial of Christ's resurrection, and consequently of his death, and of the redemption thereby effected. Which results indeed did actually take place; all these points having been denied by some of the ancient heretics. Some of these even went on to deny the reality of his human nature; pretending that the bodily appearance which his disciples saw, was only a phantom which deluded their eyes; an absurdity, to which the Apostle John alludes in his Epistle, when he says, "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ *is come in the flesh*, is not of God."

It is to be observed, however, that there is no reason to suppose that Hymenæus

and Philetus, and the rest to whom Paul alludes as denying the *resurrection*, necessarily taught that there is no *future state*, and that the present life is the whole of a man's existence. Some, indeed, it appears, *did* teach this; but there is no reason to conclude that all of them did so. It was the *resurrection*, namely, the resurrection of the *body*, that they denied; many of them teaching, doubtless, that the *soul* was to exist in a *separate* state without the body, for ever: a doctrine which many of the heathen philosophers taught, and at least professed to believe. They taught that the soul is imprisoned in the body, as it were in a dungeon, and that its activity is clogged by its union with gross material flesh and blood; so that it might be expected, when this union should be dissolved by death, that the soul would act more freely, and would have all its powers more exalted.

There were other philosophers, however, who urged in opposition to this, that the body seems to be rather a necessary *instrument* of the soul, than its prison; and that it is dependent on the bodily

organs for the exercise of its powers. It is not, indeed (they said), the eye itself that sees, nor the ear that hears; since as soon as life has quitted the body there is an end of seeing, and hearing, and the rest, although the organs of the senses remain, apparently, unchanged; but though it is the mind that sees and hears, it is by means of the bodily organs that it does so; for if the eyes are closed or destroyed, though the *mind* remains unchanged, it can receive no impression from visible objects; and the same with hearing, and the rest of the senses. If, then, said they, the mind receives, as it plainly does, all its impressions through the organs of sense, which are parts of the body, and if, as seems highly probable, the brain is the organ of thought, it follows, that the soul, so far from acting with more freedom and energy when parted from the body, will not be able to act at all; but will remain, if it continues to exist, in a state of utter insensibility, just as a man is in a state of insensibility to objects of sight, while his eyes are closed; though his spiritual part is not at all impaired. And hence they

went on so far as to conclude (very rashly) that the soul *cannot possibly* exist in an active state separately from the body; not considering that the divine Power which gives us the use of our senses, and bodily powers, may enable us, in a separate state, to perceive, and to think, and to act, in some different way, without them. But thus much we are justified in affirming, that if we *are* to retain, in a separate state, the consciousness and activity of the soul, it must be in some different manner from what we have any experience of at present; and that though it cannot be concluded positively that the soul *cannot* be sensible and active without the body, neither can it be positively decided, from the nature of the case, without revelation, that it *will*.

That there is to be a resurrection of the body, and that the state in which we are to exist to all eternity is to be a state of *union* between soul and body, is now acknowledged by all Christians; the only question is, as to the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, in which there is no such union between the soul and the body.

And this (as I before observed) some believe will be a state of consciousness, and of enjoyment or suffering. The principal reasons drawn from Scripture for the latter opinion, I have already laid before you; and though some of them have been thought by learned men to have considerable weight, they none of them, I think, are sufficient to authorise a positive conclusion.

There are also other parts of Scripture which seem to favour the opposite conclusion. In the first place, the style in which the sacred writers usually speak of the deceased is, as of persons who are "*asleep.*" For instance, in John's Gospel we read, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of his sleep;" so, also, Paul speaks of some witnesses of the resurrection of Christ who were still living at the time he wrote, and some who are "fallen asleep:" even as in the Acts, the Evangelist Luke, speaking of the stoning of Stephen, says, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep." It may be said indeed, that sleep does not imply *total insensibility;* but it must be

allowed to be strange, that the word "sleep" should so often be applied to the condition of the departed, if they are in a state of as lively consciousness and sensibility as before death, and in the actual perception of more unmixed pleasure or pain.

It has been said that the sacred Writers, in their use of these phrases, accommodated themselves to the *popular* usage; even as they speak commonly of the sun's rising and setting, &c., the true astronomical doctrine, respecting the earth's motion, being unconnected with religion, and therefore not needing to be taught by God's inspired Messengers. But if, in the present case also, the sacred Writers meant to express themselves according to the popular notions, they must have intended to express by the word "sleep" a state of insensibility; for *that* was certainly the popular use of the word when applied to the departed; as you may see, for instance, in that passage from a Greek poet, in the first Lecture, and from numberless others.

I have heard it said, that the sacred

Writers in this employment of the word "sleep," and also the authors of our burial service who adopted it from them, meant the "sleep of the body;" but I never could learn what is meant by that expression, "sleep of the body;" for the words convey to me no distinct sense. We understand what is meant by a man or any other living creature being asleep; but we never speak of a stone, or a clod of earth, or a piece of bone, or any other *inanimate* substance, sleeping; and to speak so, would appear quite unmeaning. Now a dead carcass is (as far as regards the present question) nothing more than a clod of earth. If, indeed, a man's body, at his death, remained, though inanimate, yet sound, entire, and uncorrupt, and so continued, in a torpid state, ready for the soul to reanimate it,—even as some seeds may be kept in a dry state for many years, and will be ready to vegetate as soon as exposed to moisture and warmth,—then indeed, by a very bold figure of speech, the body might be said to be asleep; even as we might, figuratively, speak of the seed as asleep. But we know that all this

is very far from the fact;—that the body decays, and is dissolved into its elements; and that the particles of which it is composed often go to make parts of vegetables and of other animals. Now to speak of a carcass thus decayed,—decomposed (as the chemists call it)—and dispersed in all directions, as *asleep*, seems to me a use of language which destroys the purpose for which language was designed; namely, to convey a distinct meaning.

It is conceivable, however, that the whole of the body may not be dissolved; that some portion of it, perhaps many times less than the smallest grain of dust, may be exempted from the general decay, —may be, however minute, very curiously organized—(for *great* and *small* are only comparative), may be the really essential part of the body, so as to be properly called, by itself, the body,—and may remain in a torpid state, like a seed, ready to be again connected with the soul. All this, however, is merely a string of suppositions; of which we can only say, that there is no one of them, as far as we can judge, that is in itself impossible. For

nothing of the kind is revealed; nor does it appear that the sacred Writers were commissioned to make known to their converts, the conscious and happy state (supposing there is such a state) of their departed friends.

The Apostle Paul, for instance, in comforting the Thessalonians concerning their deceased brethren, does not make any mention of their being *at that time* actually in a state of enjoyment; but alludes only to the joyful *resurrection* which awaited them: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as the rest,* who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, them also who sleep will God, through Jesus,† bring with Him; for this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent" (*i. e.* precede) "those who are asleep; for the Lord himself will descend from heaven,

* Not "others," as our translation has it; but, all the Gentiles "remaining" (οἱ λοιποὶ) unconverted.

† This is manifestly the correct rendering of the passage.

—and the dead in Christ shall rise first," &c. Now this was, to be sure, a very consolatory prospect respecting their departed friends; but if he had known, and had been authorized to reveal, that these very persons were *at that very time* actually admitted to a state of happiness, one cannot but suppose he would have mentioned this as an additional consolation, and one more immediately striking; instead of which he makes no mention of any such intermediate state of happiness, but merely speaks of a *hope*, as of something *future*, respecting the departed; ("Sorrow not as the rest, who have no hope,") the hope, namely, of a glorious resurrection to them that *sleep*.*

Nor does the Apostle's language, of threatening or exhortation differ in this respect from that of consolation. When his purpose is to arouse and alarm men, he still points to the same object. Paul's language to the idolaters at Athens (Acts xvii. 31,) is, that "God hath appointed a day in the which He *will judge the world* in righteousness, by that Man whom He

* See 1 Cor. xv. 19.

hath ordained." Why did he not, it may be asked, instead of confining himself to the mention of the Day of Judgment, notice also the nearer reward and punishment which should immediately succeed each man's death, if such a doctrine were part of the revelation intrusted to him?

Again, it is worth remarking that—in the passage already cited, our Lord's answer to the Sadducees,—He alludes not to any separate state of consciousness, but to the *resurrection*. That Jehovah is called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He adduces as a proof "that the *dead* are *raised*." If there had been any thought in his mind, or in that of his hearers, of an *actual* state of conscious existence of the departed, I can hardly think either that He would have used, or that his hearers would have admitted, such an argument *for a resurrection*. For they might have replied, "It is true God is not the God of the dead but of the living; and this does seem some indication that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were, and are, *living*, in a state of separation from the body; but it does not follow that they are *here-*

after to obtain a *resurrection.*" But his words seem plainly to show that the only question was, whether this present life be the whole of our existence, or whether there is to be a resurrection.*

And this leads me to remark another circumstance which throws difficulty on the subject; namely, the perpetually repeated notices of the *Day of Judgment*, and allusions to it, both in our Lord's discourses and in those of his Apostles, as to a time when (the dead being raised) all mankind shall be brought to trial before their all-seeing and unerring Judge, and receive from Him their final sentence. "I charge thee," says Paul to Timothy, "before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the quick (*i. e.* the living) and the dead, at his *appearing, and in his kingdom;*" and in the Epistle to the Romans, "As many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law, in the *day* when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel."

* This remark was suggested to me by the Rev. Reginald Courtenay in his work on a Future State.

What I mean is, that all these allusions to one particular *day* (evidently the time of the general resurrection at the end of the world), are such as seem to imply that it is *then* that every man's condition will be finally fixed. Now it is, indeed, very conceivable that the souls of men in a separate state should remain in a happy or unhappy condition till the end of the world, and should then, at the resurrection, be reunited to bodies, and enter on a *different kind* of enjoyment or of suffering; this, I say, is, in itself, very conceivable; but it is hard to conceive how, supposing *that* to be the case, the Day of *Judgment*, at the time of the resurrection, should be spoken of as it is in Scripture; since each man would (in the case just supposed) not only *know* his final condition, but actually *enter upon* his reward or punishment, *before* the resurrection, immediately on his death; so that the *judgment* of the *last day* would be in fact forestalled. It seems strange that a man should first undergo his sentence, and afterwards be brought to trial;—should *first* enter upon his reward or punishment, and *then* (per-

haps many centuries after) be tried,—and then judged, and acquitted or condemned.

The great Day of Judgment being, to all appearance, so called from some analogy to what takes place in human courts, it seems more likely than not, that it should correspond with our judicial trials in the most essential and remarkable points. Now the most important point in a judgment-day among men, is, that each person is then pronounced guilty, or not guilty, and his future fate ascertained. It does, indeed, sometimes happen, that a man knows perfectly well before-hand what his fate will be. A criminal, conscious of his guilt, and aware of the overpowering evidence that can be brought against him, has been known to exclaim, the moment he is arrested, "I am a dead man." But if this were *always* the case,—if matters were so conducted that *every one* should be fully aware, before his trial came on, what would be the issue, (nay, and had been actually undergoing his sentence,) we should consider the whole ceremony of the trial, and the solemn

pronunciation of the sentence, as no more than a matter of form. Now it does not seem likely that the great Day of Judgment, which is so much dwelt on in Scripture, should have been so called from its resemblance to our judgment-days, merely in a matter of form, and not in anything essential.

It is true that if such a day were appointed among us, on which each man, though already certain of his acquittal or condemnation, should be finally dismissed, to receive his appointed sentence,—one to death, another to imprisonment or banishment, another to liberty, &c., this would indeed be a very *important* day; but it would not be important as a day of *judgment*. It would be rather a day of *execution*;—a day of *allotment*;—a day of *assigning* to each his destined reward or punishment: but the primary and most essential character of *judgment*, or decision, would be wanting; namely, the *ascertaining* of each man's doom. Yet such we must suppose the great Judgment-day to be, if we suppose an intermediate state of consciousness, and consequently of re-

ward and punishment. For, on that supposition, each man would know, beforehand, his own doom, and would only be afterwards removed from one kind of enjoyment or suffering to another. Now, not only the very use of the words "judge," and "judgment," seems unsuited to suggest to us this view of the transaction, but moreover the Sacred Writers, and especially our Lord Himself, seem to point out the Day of Judgment as that on which the *separation* will be made of "the sheep from the goats;—on which the *decision* will take place as to each man's deserts,—the final destiny of each be *ascertained* and made known to himself: for example, "Many will come *in that day*, saying, Lord, Lord, have we not preached in thy name, ... and in thy name done many mighty works? And then will I say unto them, I know you not; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."

Some, accordingly, have felt the force of these considerations so strongly, as to have been inclined to explain away the literal sense of the predictions respecting a Day of Judgment, and to believe that

no *one time* is meant on which all are to be judged, but that each man has his own separate day of judgment, immediately on his departing this life. This seems rather a bold way of interpreting Scripture; though I do not presume to tax with heresy any one who may adopt it. In fact, if we suppose an immediate state of consciousness, and of enjoyment or suffering, we *must* (unless, indeed, we admit the Romish doctrine of purgatory) adopt either this last explanation, or one which virtually comes to the very same thing. For that day, on which man's final condemnation or acquittal is *ascertained* and announced to him, must be,—come when it will,—the day of judgment *to him*, in the most essential and primary sense of the word. A day of *general resurrection*, indeed, may be to come afterwards; and on that day each may be dismissed into the situation in which he is to remain for ever; and it may be that such a day may be what is alluded to in Scripture, under the name of the Day of Judgment: but still that which is really and essentially the day of judgment, must (on the above

supposition) have taken place before. That day, whatever it is, which determines and declares to each man his doom, must be to him, strictly and properly, *his* day of judgment.

I am aware, that both in Scripture and in ordinary discourse, the word "judgment" does not always signify the deciding on a person's condemnation or acquittal—the *separation* of the guilty and the not guilty; it is sometimes used in an unfavourable sense, to signify the denunciation or the infliction of punishment on those already condemned; as when we speak of God's judgments (that is, punishments) sent on the wicked; or (in human transactions) of a person who has been found guilty, being afterwards "brought up for judgment;" namely, to have the precise nature and amount of his punishment announced to him. In this sense it is that Jude speaks of the evil Angels being "reserved in chains to the judgment of the great day." He is evidently alluding to the case of a culprit, who, after being found guilty, is kept imprisoned *in chains*, till his final punishment is declared and

inflicted. For the fallen Angels *have* been condemned already; and, accordingly, there is no mention made of *all* Angels, the *good* as well as the bad, standing before the judgment-seat on that day, to be then separated from each other, and to have reward allotted to the one, and punishment to the other. In the case of the Angels, this decision and separation seems to be already past; and accordingly it is the *evil* Angels only that are to be judged on that day. (See Lecture VIII.) But in respect of *Men*, on the contrary, the Day of Judgment seems to be represented as that on which the wicked and the righteous are to be *separated*, and the curse and the blessing pronounced on each respectively. "*We* must *all* stand before the Judgment-seat of Christ." (See Rom. ii. 5—9, and Matt. xxv. 32, 33.)

If, therefore, this day be one and the same time for all mankind,—if Paul's declaration is to be taken in its most obvious, strict, and literal sense (which, however, I do not insist on, as certain), that God "hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness,

by that Man whom He hath ordained," then, there seems no way of reconciling the belief in *such* a day of judgment with the belief of an intermediate state of consciousness.

Upon the whole, then, I think, that the notion, of the soul, when separated from the body, entering immediately on a state of enjoyment or suffering, which is to last till the resurrection, has at least as strong reasons against it, as for it, in Scripture.

The only alternative—(as I have before observed)—the only other possible supposition,—is, that the soul remains in a state of profound sleep—of utter unconsciousness—during the whole interval between its separation from the body by death, and its re-union at the resurrection. One objection to the reception of this supposition in the minds, I apprehend, of many persons,—an objection which affects the imagination, though not the understanding,—is, that it seems as if there were a tedious and dreary interval of non-existence to be passed, by such as should be supposed to sleep, perhaps for some thou-

sands of years, which might elapse between their death and the end of the world. The imagination represents a wearisome length of time during which (on this supposition) those that sleep in Christ would have to *wait* for his final coming to reward them. We fancy it hard that they should be lost both to the world and to themselves,—destitute of the enjoyments both of this life and of the next, and continuing for so many ages as if they had never been born.

Such, I say, are the pictures which the *imagination* draws; but when we view things by the light of the understanding, they present a very different aspect. Reason tells us (the moment we consider the subject), that a long and a short space of time are exactly the same to a person who is insensible. All our notion of time is drawn from the different impressions on our minds succeeding one another:* so

* Accordingly, if we were to suppose the inward impressions, perceptions, and emotions, in two different kinds of animals, a swallow and a tortoise, for instance, to be exactly proportioned, in their quickness or slowness of succession, to the bodily movements of each respectively,—on that supposition, the swallow, living perhaps less than ten years, might enjoy, to all practical purposes, a longer life than the tortoise, which lives more than a century.

that when any one loses his consciousness (as in the case of a fainting fit, or of those recovered from drowning, suffocation, or the like) he not only does not perceive the length of the interval between the loss of his consciousness, and the return of it, but there is (*to him*) *no* such interval; the moment at which he totally lost his sensibility seems (and *is*, to *him*,) immediately succeeded by the moment in which he regains it. In the case of ordinary sleep, indeed, we are sensible, though very indistinctly, of the interval that passes; because the mind, certainly for the most part, and probably always, continues active during sleep, though in a different manner; and though the confused ideas occurring in sleep, which we call dreams, are but imperfectly remembered. Yet even in this case, it will often happen, when any one sleeps very soundly, that the moment of his waking shall appear to him immediately to succeed that of falling asleep; although the interval may have been many hours. Something of the same kind has been observed in a few instances of madness and of apoplexy; in which

all the ordinary operations of the mind having been completely suspended for several years, the patients, on the recovery of their senses, have been found totally unconscious of the whole interval, and distinctly remembering and speaking of, as having happened the day before, events which occurred before the seizure; so that they could hardly be brought to believe that whole years had since elapsed.*

From considering such instances as these, as well as from the very nature of the case, any one may easily convince himself, that if ever a total insensibility takes place, so that all action of the mind is completely suspended, the time during which this continues, whether a single minute or a thousand years, is, to the person himself, no time at all. In either case, the moment of his reviving must appear to him immediately to succeed that of his sinking into unconsciousness; nor could he possibly be able to tell after-

* A case occurred within my own knowledge, not long ago, of a sick person who fell into a kind of trance which lasted several weeks; and immediately on her revival she asked for some grapes, which had been brought into her room just before she became insensible.

wards, from his own sensations and recollections, whether this state of suspended animation had lasted an hour, a day, or a century.

To all practical purposes, *that* is, to each, a long, or a short time, which is such to his perceptions. Some of you may probably have known what it is to pass a night of that excessive restlessness which accompanies some particular kinds of illness. Such persons will easily remember (what no one else can fully conceive) how insufferably tedious a single night will in such a case appear;—how enormously long the interval seemed to be between the times of the clock's striking;—how they seemed to feel as if morning would never arrive. And if it has happened that the next night the patient was completely relieved and slept quite soundly, the very same number of hours which the night before had seemed to him an age, would appear but a moment. The clock, indeed, he is well aware, has made the same movements in the one case as in the other; but relatively to the sick man himself, and as far as his feelings are concerned, the one

night will have been immensely shorter than the other.

The long and dreary interval, then, between death and the Day of Judgment (supposing the intermediate state to be a profound sleep), does not exist at all, except in the imagination. To party concerned there is *no* interval whatever; but to each person (according to this supposition) the moment of his closing his eyes in death, will be instantly succeeded by the sound of the last trumpet, which shall summon the dead; even though ages shall have intervened. And in this sense the faithful Christian may be, practically, in paradise the day he dies. The promise made to the penitent thief, and the Apostle Paul's wish "to depart and to be with Christ," which, he said, was "far better" than to remain any longer in this troublesome world, would each be fulfilled to all practical purposes, provided each shall have found himself in a state of happiness in the presence of his Lord, the very instant (according to his own perception) after having breathed his last in this world.

Some of you may perhaps have found a difficulty in reconciling together the Apostle Paul's expression in one place, of his wish "to depart and to be with Christ," and his expressions in many other places, concerning the departed, as "asleep." If (it may be said) he expected to remain in a profound sleep from death till the resurrection, why should he speak of his impatience to "be with Christ?" since his dying sooner or later would make no difference as to the time when the last day shall arrive: if, on the other hand, he believed that a faithful servant of Christ would enjoy happiness in his Master's presence, immediately on dying, before the resurrection, then, why did he never comfort the Thessalonians or any other Christians, by telling them that this was the case with their deceased friends? Why does he on the contrary always speak of these as sleeping, and hold out to the survivors only the hope of the final resurrection?

Now I think these different expressions of the Apostle may be understood, so as to be reconciled together, on the supposition of a state of sleep between death and the

resurrection: though I do not undertake to say that they cannot be reconciled (which however I have never seen attempted) on any other supposition.

Imagine to yourself the case of a sincere Christian, who (we will suppose) is convinced that this supposition is the fact. If he were asked what he thought of the condition of some *deceased friends* who had lived and died in the faith and fear of God, he would of course reply, "They 'sleep in Jesus;' we must not regard them as at this moment actually enjoying their reward; but neither must we 'sorrow as those who have no hope;' on the contrary, we must fully trust that they will be raised up to immortal happiness at the last day." If again this same man were *himself* seemingly at the point of death in some lingering and painful disease, and worn down by other grievous afflictions, and were asked what he thought of *his own* prospects, he would be likely to answer, "I long to be released from my sufferings, and 'to be with Christ;' for I believe that, to my own perceptions, the instant death closes my eyes, I shall be awakened by the last

trump,—the summons to meet my Lord. And though in relation to *you the survivors*, my dying this hour or a year hence, makes no difference as to the time when that day shall arrive, to *me*, it makes all the difference: *absolutely*, the interval from now to the general resurrection is the same; but *relatively* to me, it does, to all practical purposes, come the sooner, the sooner I am released from the burden of 'this earthly tabernacle.'"

You observe I have represented this man as speaking (which he naturally would do) in a very different tone when he is speaking of the deceased friends whom he survives, and when he is speaking of his own death: and this, not from his supposing the conditions of the two parties to be at all different, absolutely; but from their being very different *in relation to himself*. When he considers himself as the survivor of his friends, he speaks of their remaining in a state of insensibility for an interval, perhaps a long one, before they awake to happiness; for, *relatively*, to the *survivors*, there *is* an interval: when he considers himself, not as a survivor, but as just

departing, he speaks of no interval, but of awaking to happiness immediately; because *relatively* to *himself* there *is* no interval.

It is thus then that the Apostle Paul, or any other sincere Christian WOULD express himself, supposing him to have such a belief. And just thus it is that Paul *does* express himself. Whenever he is administering comfort to the survivors respecting their brethren who have departed in the Lord, he always speaks of them as "asleep," and always points to the hope of the *general resurrection;* and also when he is speaking of *himself in conjunction with others*, his language is, "I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown* of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me in that day; and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing." On the other hand, when he speaks of his eager longing "to depart and to be with Christ," he is

* He is here alluding to the public games in Greece, in which the winner in a race or wrestling-match was solemnly *crowned* by the appointed *judges*.

speaking of himself, solely, without any reference to the perceptions and feelings of the survivors, but only to his own. Now in respect of his own perceptions, the moment of his breathing his last in this world, would be, as has been said, instantly succeeded (on the supposition of total insensibility during the interval) by that of his awaking in the presence of his Lord.

I do not presume to say that this completely proved that the Apostle believed the intermediate state to be one of sleep; much less, that he was commissioned to teach such a doctrine. But it does appear plain to me that if he *had* believed that doctrine, he would have expressed himself just as he has done.

It is difficult, I acknowledge, for a man to reconcile it to his imagination, that though the end of the world may not perhaps come for many ages hence, yet he will, himself, to his own perceptions, the very moment after his eyes are closed in death, find himself summoned to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, on the last day: it is difficult, I say, to *imagine*

this; but it is impossible (on the supposition of a total insensibility) not to *believe* it; for that, in *that* case, it would be so, is matter of absolute demonstration.

Nor would there be, on this supposition, any *loss* of happiness that might otherwise have been enjoyed during the interval. During our abode here indeed, which is for a limited time, an interval of total insensibility would be reckoned so much taken out of your life; you would awake unconscious indeed of the time that had elapsed, but so much nearer to the grave. But that which is taken from eternity, does not shorten it: such is the nature of that incomprehensible thing, eternity (which we cannot but believe, though we cannot understand it), that it is not diminished by any portion of time subtracted from it. If we are all destined, as we are, to live *for ever*, he that is born, for example, a thousand years earlier, cannot be said to have a longer life than he who is born a thousand years later.

Whether, however, this be the case or not,—whether the soul retains or loses its consciousness during the interval of the

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separation from the body, is a question which the Scriptures, I think, do not authorize us positively to determine: and if so, a man may be a good Christian, whichever of the two opinions he holds, provided he do not censure as heretical such as may *differ from him* on this point.

And it appears to me that good reasons may be perceived why the Scriptures have *not* revealed this knowledge to us; or at least, have not spoken more decidedly on the question than they have done. And I will, in conclusion, lay some of these reasons before you.

First, let us suppose that the soul does retain its consciousness, and remain in a state of enjoyment or suffering during the intermediate time between death and the resurrection. There seems to be good reason why this truth (supposing it a truth) should not have been distinctly revealed. In the first place, it could be of no practical necessity. If, as is quite clear, a man's final condition depends on his conduct in this life, and cannot be altered by anything that takes place after death,

there can be no advantage in *his* knowing, during his life, or his surviving *friends*, afterwards, what the intermediate state is. If they were told that this is a state of consciousness, and of happiness or misery, the survivors would be tempted (I speak not now from conjecture, but from the experience of what took place, before the Reformation in our own Church, and is still retained in several others) to offer up prayers for him, that if he is in a state of suffering he may be relieved from it: as is still the practice with those of the Greek and Romish communions, and some others.

These prayers, it has been said, are *harmless*, even if vain and ineffectual. In themselves they may be so; but if it should become the established practice (as with them) to pray for the souls of the deceased, and to suppose those prayers may be efficacious (which of course *is* supposed by those who offer them), what is the consequence? Inevitably it follows, that men will be tempted to trust in these prayers for their souls after death, rather than to their own exertions during life. So many as are the excuses by which Satan leads

men to continue in a life of negligence or sin, trusting that all will be well at the last, such an obvious and consolatory delusion as this, we may be sure would seldom fail to take effect. And, accordingly, we know how common a practice it was (and is still in some unreformed Churches) to make amends, as they thought, for an ungodly life, by leaving large sums of money to monks and others, to pray for their souls; and founding convents for that purpose.

Another most dangerous error, which (I do not say *might* arise, but) actually has arisen in the Romish and Greek Churches, much worse than that of praying *for* the dead, is that of praying *to* the dead. Believing that the souls of eminently holy men are in a state of consciousness and enjoyment in the presence of God, no one could be sure that one or more of these holy men might not be, invisibly, near at hand: thence he was tempted to address a request to them, on the *chance* of its being so, that they would pray to God on his behalf; as any one of us might (and might lawfully) beg some

devout friend to pray for him. By degrees this grew into a custom: they addressed their petitions to those holy men (or saints) for their intercession, first with a hope, and then with a confidence, of being heard; and these prayers were, and now are, offered up by thousands of persons who are in various places; and who thus presumptuously attribute to each saint the power of being,—or at least knowing what passes—in many places at once,—one of the attributes of God Himself; and dare to pay that worship to the creature which is due to the Creator alone: or to get out of that difficulty, absurdly make God reveal to the saints the prayers, which they then repeat back to Him.

If we look to the Scriptures, we find no shadow of authority for all this, nor for anything that could lead to it. It *has* indeed arisen in christian Churches; but it has arisen in consequence of these Churches having dared to teach, as articles of faith, what Scripture has never revealed.

But if, on the other hand, we suppose the contrary opinion to be true,—that the

soul is in a profound and insensible sleep during the intermediate state, there is good reason why this also should not have been clearly revealed.

It not only seems not necessary to christian practice, but it might with some Christians have a disheartening effect. Though they might be perfectly sure of attaining, if it were not their own fault, a joyful resurrection, and though their understanding might assent (as indeed it could not but assent) to the truth, that a long or short interval of insensibility are exactly the same to the party concerned, —that there can be no difference between waiting one moment or ten centuries, in a perfect sleep, from death to the resurrection,—yet there are many persons who could not easily bring their feelings to keep pace with their understanding in such a case. Their fancy might present pictures of weariness and discomfort, which their reason would not be strong enough to dispel. And as their uneasiness would answer no good purpose, it seems agreeable to divine wisdom and goodness that it should be spared them, and that

yet the Scriptures should so far leave the question at large, that those whose feelings strongly biassed and inclined them to either opinion, should not be compelled to adopt the other.

One important practical conclusion from what has been said is (as I have already observed), the duty of making allowance for difference of opinion, and judging candidly of notions opposite to our own, in a case like this, where something plausible, at least, may be urged on each side; and where, though only one can be right, neither need be *dangerously* wrong. The parent of this charitable candour is humility;—a due sense of the weakness of our faculties in judging by ourselves on such points;—and a disposition thankfully to accept the instruction God has given us in his written word, be it much or little.

I shall in the ensuing Lectures pursue the consideration of several other points connected with the resurrection, and the world to come: and I shall not think the time lost which is employed in discussing any point (whether of *immediate* practical

consequence or not) which is connected directly with matters of such vast importance; and in presenting, in various points of view, and detaining your thoughts on, a subject which is so familiar to many, that it has almost lost the power (through long use) of affecting their minds. My labour will not have been in vain if I can have made even any one person say within himself, "Is it, then, really true that there *is* another world, which I must shortly enter? Am I indeed destined to live after my corpse shall have mouldered into dust? Shall I have to give an account, in a few years, of all my life here, and, among the rest, of the words I am now listening to? *Die* I certainly shall: —it is an awful plunge at any rate: but what is the state I shall then be in? I shall soon know:—let me consider, while I am yet able to alter that state!"

LECTURE V.

The Resurrection.

THERE was an objection urged against the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead taught by the Apostle Paul, by some of those whom he was opposing,—"Some men will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" And it is probable that many of these persons were not such as denied a *future state* altogether, but only the *resurrection of the body.* They had perhaps satisfied themselves of the immortality of the soul by philosophical arguments, such as are to be met with in ancient and also in modern writers. I must say they appear to me far from satisfactory. Such as they are, however, many persons have been convinced by these arguments; and among others, I imagine, some of those

against whom the Apostle is writing; who perhaps were on this account the more unwilling to receive the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, because *that* certainly could not be made out by any course of reasoning. For there always have been, as there are now, not a few, who seem to measure the power of God by the standard of their own minds; and are loth to admit, even on the authority of his assurance, the truth of anything which they cannot explain. Such persons would be very likely to start the objection—"How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" "We see," they might say, "the decay and corruption of the body before our eyes;—are the same particles of matter which moulder and crumble into dust, to be brought together again at the resurrection? Or if not, how can it be the *same* body, which a man quits at his death, and with which he is to be raised up? *How*, in short, are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" And whatever answer might be given, they thought, no doubt, that insuperable

objections might be raised against it. The Apostle reproaches them with folly, in starting a difficulty no greater than lies against many of the ordinary operations of nature, which we daily witness; as, for instance, the growth of a plant from the seed.

It is not a little remarkable that the prevailing opinion should be (as I believe it is), that the very same particles of bodily substance which are laid in the grave, or otherwise disposed of, are to be reassembled and reunited at the resurrection; so as to form, as is supposed, the *same* body in which the soul resided before death; and that Scripture teaches us to believe this. Paul's words, however, express, almost as strongly as words can, the direct contrary. The illustration which he employs is that of *seed sown*; an illustration, which, though he cannot be required to agree in every point with the case it is brought to illustrate, yet affords a presumption at least that the two cases agree as far as there is no reason against it. Now we know that a plant raised from a seed is a very

different thing from the seed it sprung from, both in form, and in size, and in most of its properties. The seed itself is completely destroyed as to its structure, and, as chemists call it, decomposed; while the young plant is nourished and its substance formed, chiefly at least, from the earth, the air, and the rains: so that if *any* of the particles of matter which were in the seed remain in the plant when fully grown (which is necessarily a matter of uncertainty), they must bear an immensely small proportion to the whole. We are not, indeed, authorized to conclude that all these circumstances must correspond with what shall take place at the resurrection, merely from the Apostle's having used this illustration: but he himself calls our attention to that very point; "that which thou sowest is not quickened (*i. e.* made alive), except it die." Here we have him expressly reminding us that a grain of corn, when sown, *dies*, that is, is dissolved, and its structure destroyed, never to be restored; which is the very illustration used by our Lord also, in speaking of the same subject: "Verily I say unto you,

except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remaineth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." We are reminded also, that it is not a *plant* that is sown, but a *seed;* and that we raise from it, not the same thing that was sown, but a plant, which is very different: "thou sowest *not* that body that shall be; but bare grain (*i. e.* a mere seed), it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain; but God *giveth* it a body, as it hath pleased Him; and to every seed its own body."

Though a body, then, shall be given us at the Resurrection, yet it is to be a very different kind of body from what we now have. "It is sown," says the Apostle, "in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power."

Now, here it is worth while to remark, that when he speaks thus of our being "sown in weakness," some suppose that he refers to the committing of a *dead* body to the ground;—a body which has lost all the grace and beauty it may have once possessed, and from which the defacing hand of decay is about to sweep

the last lingering traces of loveliness. But if you look more narrowly into the context, you will see, I think, that this cannot have been his meaning. For you will perceive that it is our present *living* frame, and not our *dead* body, that he is all along contrasting with our resurrection-state. It is not with the mouldering mass of corruption which we are forced to hide in the ground out of our sight, that the new body is compared, but with our present vile body, even in its best state; for even in its best state it is "corruptible." "There is," says he, "a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. For so it is written, the first man, Adam, was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." The sense here is obscured by the word "*natural*," which unfortunately is found in our version; for it quite disguises the connexion of thought between this and the next verse, where Adam is spoken of as a "living soul." The real sense would be much better expressed in modern English by saying, instead of "natural body," *animal* body; that is, a body

possessed of animal life;—such a body, in short, as Adam had, "of the earth, earthy," and the principle of life in which was different from the immortal spirit. "There is," says the Apostle, "an animal body, and there is a spiritual body; and these we derive from different ancestors: Adam was made a living animal; Christ is a quickening [that is, life-giving] spirit."

Now, here you see plainly that it is not the contrast between an actually *dead* body and a living one that he is thinking of, but of the difference between two frames—one merely animal, the other spiritual. If we are speaking of the burial of the *dead* body, it is not correct to say that it is sown, or buried, an animal body; for animal life has *departed* before it is laid in the ground. But if we take this "sowing" to refer not to our burial, but to the *origin* of our present mortal frame—to our *entrance* into this world, not our departure—then the Apostle's language is clear and pertinent. We *are* sown—we are brought into this world—with animal frames, with bodies weak and tender, with bodies taken from the dust of

the earth, and hastening every day to corruption; and with these, the imperishable and glorious body which Christ will give is fitly contrasted.

What has put the idea of "*burial*" into some people's heads as the thought corresponding to *sowing*, is the 37th verse; and yet if you will look closely at that verse, you will perceive that it really makes the other way. "That which thou sowest is not quickened [made alive], except it *die*." The decomposition and breaking up of the structure of the seed, he calls, figuratively, its "death:" it is like death—a kind of dissolution;—a great, and to a hasty observer a seemingly destructive, change that takes place. The Apostle, you will observe, does not say "unless it corrupt," but "unless it *die*." Nor does he call this change *dying*, unless he meant to compare it, not, surely, with corruption, but with *death*. And if so, it is plain the thing corresponding with that change must be *our death*. The seed is first sown; and then dies; and then springs up again. And if this be applied to Man's condition,—first *sown* into the

world, then *dying*, and then *raised*; the comparison is intelligible and beautiful. But it will not at all agree with the case of a mere dead body. A corpse cannot die. It is dead already: dead *before* put into the earth. And therefore it would not have suited Paul's purpose to speak of it as *dying* seed. It must be therefore our present animal living-frame that he speaks of as seed which must *die* before it can be quickened. The immortal spirit which is to animate a new and better frame must be separated from the former one, as the germ is from the husk, before we can attain our destined glory.

And this interpretation is confirmed by the words of our Lord himself, who employs the very same figure (John xii. 24) —"Verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Here He is evidently speaking of the glorious consequences of his own death. Some Greeks had desired to see Him; and this had suggested to his mind the enlargement of the kingdom of God to all nations, which was not to

take place till after his death, then just at hand. He compares Himself, therefore, to a seed which must die before it becomes fruitful: and I need not remark that the idea of *corruption* can have had no place here, since He was not to "see corruption." Hence it is clear that it is to the death of a living man, not to the mouldering of a dead carcase, that He is comparing the change which takes place in a seed cast into the ground.

And precisely similar, no doubt, is the thought of the Apostle, who would hardly have made the actual corruption of the body a necessary condition of its being raised, when, in the case of Christ himself —the very type and example of the Resurrection—no such corruption took place.

What he is contrasting, then, is (as I have said) our present animal frame, sown in this world, with our future spiritual one, raised into the next world. "It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power."

It is indeed admitted, that, according to Paul's expression, we shall all be *changed;* that we shall have bodies con-

siderably different from what we now have; but still, many persons cling to the idea, that all the same *particles of matter* which belong to our bodies now, must be brought together and reunited: a notion not authorized by Scripture, and liable to many objections hard to be answered; which therefore are likely to be the means of shaking a man's faith in the whole doctrine. The opinion is indeed, in itself, so harmless, however groundless, that I should not have occupied your time with arguments against it, were it not that it leaves an opening for the cavils of irreligious scoffers. If a man who has taken up the persuasion that this notion is an essential part of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, happens to meet with unbelievers who raise (as may easily be done) insuperable objections against it, and turn it into ridicule, the consequence will be, that he will be perplexed with doubt respecting the doctrine of the resurrection itself, and will be in danger of "making shipwreck of his faith." And thus it may chance to be of the highest practical consequence to think rightly on

a point which has, in *itself*, no practical tendency.

Let it be remembered, then, that even for a *body* to be the *same*, it is not at all necessary that it should consist of the same particles of matter. Our bodies, we know, are undergoing during life a constant change of substance from continual waste and continual renewal: and anatomists, who have carefully studied the structure of the human frame, have proved that this perpetual change,—this system of constant loss and supply,—extends even to the most solid part of the body, the bones; which, as well as the rest, are gradually worn away, and repaired; so that there is every reason to conclude that all the particles of matter which compose our bodies are changed several times during our life; and that no one living body has any particle of the same substance now remaining in it, which it had several years ago. Why then should it be supposed that the same identical particles of matter, which belonged to any one's body at his death, must be brought together at his resurrection in order to make

the *same* body; when even during his life-time the same particles did not remain, but were changed many times over?

Nor again, is it necessary, in order to constitute the same *person* (whether we call it the same *body* or not) that the body should be the same, in form, in magnitude, or in any of its qualities. This must be evident to any one who does but reflect, that he calls himself the same person who some years ago was a child. Every one who says that so many years ago *he was* an *infant*, knows well that an infant is extremely different, in body and in mind, from a grown man; and yet implies by the very expression, that he is the *same person;* since otherwise he could not say that *he was* that infant.

What it is that constitutes a man one and the same person, through all periods of his life, I shall not undertake to explain: but it is plain enough what it is *not;* it is plain that it is not *resemblance* of any qualities either of body or mind. Likeness or unlikeness have nothing to do with it. The same person who *was* an infant, and *is* a man, is not called the

SAME PERSON from any *resemblance* between an infant and a man.*

With respect to the *sameness of our bodies*, it seems clear enough, that a man's body is called *his*, from its union with his soul, and the mutual influence of the one on the other. Any one of his limbs, he calls a part of his body, or part of himself, on account of its connexion with the rest of the body, and with the mind. If the limb were cut off, he would no longer call it, properly, a part of his body; but would say, that it *was* so, and is, no longer. And his whole body is considered as the same, and as his, from year to year, not from its consisting of the same particles of matter (which it does not), but from its belonging to the same soul,—and conveying feelings and perceptions to the same mind,—and obeying the directions of the same will. So that if, at the resurrection, we are clothed with bodies which we, in this way, perceive to belong to us, and to be ours, it signifies nothing, of what particles of bodily substance they are composed.

*See Whately's Elements of Logic, App., Art. SAME.

Some, I believe, cling to the notion, that the same bodily particles must be reunited at the resurrection, from an impression that otherwise it could not be called a "resurrection of the body." I find no fault with them for believing this: and if they insist that the phrase "resurrection of the body" ought not to be used except to express this sense, though I do not agree with them, it would be foreign to the present purpose to discuss that question, since the interpretation of *Scripture* is not concerned in it; for throughout *Scripture* the phrase "resurrection of the body" or "resurrection of the flesh" *nowhere occurs*. The Scriptures only speak of Man's resurrection from the dead—of his "vile body" being "changed"—of his being "clothed upon," &c.

The other phrases were introduced into the early creeds for the purpose of opposing those ancient heretics, who explained away the resurrection as a mere figure (2 Tim. ii. 18), or held the immortality of the soul apart from the body.

In fact, if men would apply on these subjects the same principles of common

sense with which they judge of many of the affairs of human life, they would escape many difficulties, and find that there is no necessity, in such a case as this, for holding a doctrine open to powerful objections. If any one's house, for instance, were destroyed, and another man promised to *re*build it for him, he would not be considered as failing in his promise because he did not put together all the former materials. If the materials were equally good, and if the man were put in possession of a house not less commodious and beautiful than he had before, *that* would be to all practical purposes sufficient. It would be thought idle cavilling to contend that this was not, strictly speaking, a rebuilding of the *same* house, but the building of a different one; because the materials were new; and that therefore the promise was not fulfilled. No one would attend to such a frivolous distinction, when all practical purposes were completely answered.

And the promise would be much *more* than fulfilled, if the materials were tenfold more durable—the building tenfold more beautiful and commodious than the former

one. This will be the case of those who sleep in Christ: they will be raised up with bodies which they will *feel* to be their own, and which *will*, for *that* reason, be their own, but which will be far different from the "earthly tabernacles" (that is, *tents*) of flesh and blood, in which they dwell here, and "will be made," says the Apostle, "like unto the glorious body of Christ." "All flesh," says he, "is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of beasts, another of birds, and another of fishes; there are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial;" that is, we may well believe that the faithful will, in their glorified state, have bodies, as *truly* bodily as they have now, although very different from those frail and imperfect bodies in which we now dwell: which would be even more unfit for the new and exalted state they are to enter upon, than the tender and unfinished frame of an infant is for the actions and enjoyments of a man. For "flesh and blood," says he, (that is, such flesh and blood as we are now composed of,) "cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corrup-

tion" (that is, a perishable body like ours) "inherit incorruption." A bird, a beast, and a fish, have as truly bodies, the one as the other; and each fitted for the kind of life to which Providence has destined it, and unfitted for a different one: "all flesh," therefore, says the Apostle, "is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of beasts, and another of birds, and another of fishes;" so that, as a beast or fish, for example, must receive a different kind of body, if it were to be qualified for the life of a bird; so must we, if we are to enter on a new kind of existence, be qualified for it by a new kind of body.*

Of this new kind of body, he tells us no more than that it will be "incorruptible;" and that it will be (in Christ's approved followers) made after the image of *his* body. For as all men, being descended from Adam, bear his image, and naturally resemble him both in body and disposition,

* There are in fact several kinds of reptiles and of insects, which, in one stage of their existence, live in the water, and are of the nature of fishes; and afterwards become land-animals.

so those who having been born anew "of water and of the Spirit," shall have laboured to "grow in grace" during this life, and to conform themselves to the pattern of their great Master, so as "to grow up into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," will, through his unspeakable goodness, be raised up by Him, at the last day, in his likeness. Having done their utmost during this their state of trial, his mercy will do the rest, when their trial is past. The encouragement of their exertions to resemble Him, is the promise that He will complete the work for them. "We know not," says the Apostle John, "what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like unto Him, for we shall see Him as He is; and every one that hath this hope on Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure."* "The first man," says Paul, "is of the earth, earthy; the second man is [the Lord†] from heaven;" (in

* "On Him," that is, resting on Him, is the exact rendering.

† These words are absent in the best Manuscripts. They were probably the note of some commentator. The sense is the same.

which expression he alludes to the name "Adam," which signifies "earth,") "and as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." "Behold, I show you a mystery" (that is, I reveal to you a secret,—a truth which reason could not discover); "we shall not all sleep" (that is, all mankind will not be in the grave;—there will be one generation alive on the earth at the time of Christ's coming to judgment,) "but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed;"—*we* (that is, those who shall remain alive) shall undergo our change at the time when those asleep shall be raised; and all will together appear before their great Judge.

It seems to me not improbable that the change which shall take place in the body may be itself the appointed means for bringing about a change in the powers and tendencies of the mind. It is plain that the mind greatly depends on the

body as its instrument; and on the several members of the body depend the exercise of several distinct powers of the mind: so that the loss or imperfection of any one particular organ,—of the eye, for instance—or of the ear,—will shut out one particular kind of knowledge and of thought from the mind;—that of colours, for instance,—or that of sounds. It is quite possible, therefore, that our minds may at this moment actually possess faculties which have never been exercised, and of which we have no notion whatever; which have lain inactive, unperceived, and undeveloped, for want of such a structure of bodily organs as is necessary to call them forth and give play to them. A familiar instance of this kind, is the case of a man born blind; whose *mind* or spiritual part is as perfect in itself as another man's; his mind is as capable even of receiving impressions of visible objects by the eyes, as if the eyes themselves (the bodily part) were perfect: for it is plainly, not the *eyes* that see, but the *mind* by means of the eyes; yet through this imperfection, one whole class of ideas,—all those

of objects of sight,—are completely wanting in such a man. Nor could he ever even find out his imperfection, if he were not told of it; he learns from *others*, that there is such a thing as seeing, and as light and colours, though he cannot comprehend what they are. And if you could suppose such a case as blind persons brought up from childhood without ever being taught that others possessed a sense more than themselves, they would never suspect anything at all on the subject: should they then obtain sight, they would be astonished at discovering that they had all along been in possession, as far as the mind is concerned, of a faculty which they had had no opportunity to exercise, and of whose very existence they had never dreamed,—the faculty of perceiving the visible objects presented to the mind by the eye.*

Now I think it is not unlikely,—it certainly is not impossible—that the like may be our case;—that our minds may have, even now, faculties which lie dormant at present (as the power of sight

* See note at the end of this Lecture.

does in a blind man); and that these would be called into action by a mere change in our bodily frame, and a new system of organs. And if this should take place in a future state, we should at once be enabled to perceive, merely by means of a bodily change, whole classes of objects as new to our minds as colours are to a blind-born man; and as totally different from any we are now acquainted with, as colours are from sounds. And by some change of this kind in the *brain*, an equally great revolution may, for aught we can tell, be produced in our *thinking* faculties also,—those by which we are distinguished from brutes;—and an equal enlargement produced in our powers of reasoning and judging.

On all these points, however, the Sacred Writers have not thought fit to gratify our curiosity, but have been content to tell us generally, that we shall be greatly changed, without attempting to explain what that change shall be.

And here it may be worth noticing, that the portion of Scripture we have

been considering, affords an argument for the truth of our religion, that is perfectly within the reach of plain unlearned Christians;—of such persons as some pretend cannot be expected to give a reason for "the hope that is in them," but must be content to believe just what they are told. Now let such a one, if he chance to meet with an unbeliever, who treats Christianity as a series of "cunningly devised fables," merely put before him this portion of Scripture, and ask him how it happens that neither Paul, nor any other of the Sacred Writers, has given a full, detailed, and captivating description of everything that is to take place at the end of the world;—of all the interesting particulars of the glorified bodies with which the faithful will rise, and of the heavenly joys to which they will be admitted.

Nothing certainly could have been more likely to gratify the curiosity of believers, and even to attract fresh converts, than a lively and magnificent description of heavenly glories. And those who gave full credit to the writer, as the Corinthians evidently did to Paul, would

not have hesitated to believe his account of these things. Had he been an impostor, it would not have been at all difficult for him to invent such a description; and had he been an enthusiast, he could not have avoided it. One, whose imagination had got the better of his judgment, and whose wild fancies were regarded by himself as revelations, could never have treated of such a subject as this without being tempted by its mysterious and deep interest, to invent, and actually believe, a vast number of particulars respecting the other world.

Why, then, you may ask, do we find nothing of this nature in the writings of the Apostles? The plain answer is, because they were not either impostors or enthusiasts; but plain, simple, honest men, who taught only what had been revealed to them, and what they had been commissioned to reveal to others. You may safely defy an unbeliever to give any other answer to the question, if he can. For near eighteen centuries has this proof remained uncontradicted; and in all that time no one has given, or even attempted

to give, any explanation of the brief, unadorned, cool, and unpretending accounts which the New-Testament-writers give of matters so interesting to man's curiosity, except by considering them as upright and sober-minded men, setting forth what they knew to be truth, just as they had received it.*

* On this subject I cannot forbear extracting a most admirable passage from the "London Review," No. II. pp. 345, 346.

"Theirs is a history of miracles; the historical picture of the scene in which the Spirit of God was poured on all flesh: and signs and wonders, visions and dreams, were part of the essentials of their narratives. How is all this related? With the same absence of high colouring and extravagant description with which other writers notice the ordinary occurrences of the world: partly, no doubt, for the like reason, that they were really familiar with miracles; partly, too, because to them these miracles had long been contemplated only as subservient measures to the great object and business of their ministry—the salvation of men's souls. On the subject of miracles, the means to this great end, they speak in calm, unimpassioned language; on man's sins, change of heart, on hope, faith, and charity; on the objects, in short, to be effected, they exhaust all their feelings and eloquence. Their history, from the narrative of our Lord's persecutions, to those of Paul, the abomination of the Jews, embraces scenes and personages which claim from the ordinary reader a continual effusion of sorrow, or wonder, or indignation. In writers who were friends of the parties, and adherents of the cause for which they did and suffered so great things,

And it should be observed, that if we were totally unable to perceive the *wis-*

the absence of it is on ordinary grounds inconceivable. Look at the account even of the crucifixion. Not one burst of indignation or sympathy mixes with the details of the narrative. Stephen the first martyr is stoned, and the account comprised in these few words, 'They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' The varied and immense labours and sufferings of the Apostles are slightly hinted at, or else related in this dry and frigid way: 'And when they had called the Apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.' 'And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city; and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.' Had these authors no feeling? Had their mode of life bereaved them of the common sympathies and sensibilities of human nature? Read such passages as St. Paul's parting address to the elders of Miletus; the same Apostle's recommendation of the offending member of the Corinthian Church to pardon; and more than all, the occasional bursts of conflicting feeling, in which anxious apprehension for the faith and good behaviour of his converts is mixed with the pleasing recollection of their conversion, and the minister and the man are alike strongly displayed; and it will be plain that Christianity exercised no benumbing influence on the heart. No: their whole soul was occupied with one object, which predominated over the means subservient to it, however great those means might be. In the storm, the pilot's eye is fixed on the headland that must be weathered; in the crisis of

dom, or to guess the cause, of the Sacred Writers giving us such scanty accounts of the life to come, still, the proof which this scantiness affords of the *truth* of what they say, remains the same. For if they wrote as no impostor and no enthusiast ever would write, *they could have been neither*. What cannot have come from Man, must have come from God; whether we can perceive anything of its divine excellence or not.

But in the present instance, we *can* perceive, not only that there must, in all likelihood, be many circumstances in the condition of the blest hereafter which we

victory or defeat, the general sees only the position to be carried, and the dead and the instruments of death fall around him unheeded. On the salvation of men, on this one point, the witnesses of Christ and the ministers of his Spirit, expended all their energy of feeling and expression. All that occurred—mischance, persecution, and miracle—were glanced at by the eye of faith, only in subserviency to this mark of the prize of their high calling, as working together for good, and all exempt from the associations which would attach to such events and scenes, when contemplated by themselves, and with the short-sightedness of uninspired men. Miracles were not to them objects of wonder, nor mischances a subject of sorrow and lamentation. They did all, they suffered all, to the glory of God."

could not comprehend, but also that great part of what might be made intelligible to the understanding, respecting heavenly joys, would make no impression on the hearts of those who most need to be impressed. For every one is naturally disposed to form his notions of happiness from his own life and character; so that the highest and purest happiness would not appear desirable, if described fully to one whose mind was not yet brought to a relish for it. If you describe to a child the comfort and respectability in life, to which you are leading him by the discipline and education you bestow, it will be partly incomprehensible to him, and partly such as he feels less relish for than for his own childish pleasures: but you exhort him to take your word in this matter, and dutifully and confidently to follow your directions; in short, to have *faith* in you, and to "walk by faith." And you might safely assure him, that in proportion as he does this, he will gradually be, not only advancing towards the good ends you have in view for him, but also understanding more and more that

they *are* good, and perceiving their real value.

Even so, we must take God's assurance that what He provides for his faithful servants will be for their greatest happiness, though the good things of which it consists be such as "it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive." Indeed even the best Christian, in the present imperfect state, could not, I suppose, fully estimate the goodness of many of these things, were they revealed to him: but one who has been little exercised in religious meditation and practice, will still more imperfectly relish even what *is* revealed of heavenly bliss: the worldly and the sensual can see little or nothing desirable in it.

We must give ourselves up to God's guidance, and follow, out of reverent obedience and gratitude to Him, the path which He assures us will lead to our truest happiness; and our notions of happiness will alter, and will improve more and more, as we advance in that path.*

I shall hereafter offer to your consider-

* See Lecture X. at the end.

ation some remarks respecting the Day of Judgment, and the final condition of men in the next world; about which also we have a clear indeed, and positive, but by no means a full and particular revelation afforded by Scripture. What it is the most important for us to know, is the most distinctly taught; and especially this, that the great day of the Lord will "come as a thief in the night,"* without any warning or notice whatever.

What would be your sensations were I empowered to announce that it would take place to-morrow? Or to-day? How would you wish to have spent your time here? In what condition to be found? For aught we know, it *may* come at any time; but if you believe the Scriptures, you are sure it *must*, at *some* time or other: and if that should not be for a thousand years hence, yet practically, to each one of us, it will take place very soon: for to each individual man, the end of his own life is as the end of the world: it is the end of *his* business in this world: it is his summons to meet his Judge.

* See Lecture XII.

Consider therefore now, how you would wish to have lived if this your end were at hand. If I *could* reveal to you that it is so, my notice would come too late: the past cannot be altered; and there would, in that case, be no future to amend. It is precisely because I do *not* give this notice,—because you are still in a state of uncertainty,—that it is profitable to think on the subject, and to prepare betimes for that which cannot be prepared for when it comes. When the bridegroom knocks, it will be too late to seek oil for your lamps.

"Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh." "Blessed is the servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching."

Note.—The following account of a person born blind, and couched by Mr. Chesselden (extracted from the Philosophical Transactions), affords an interesting illustration of some of my remarks:—

"*Observations made by Mr. W. Chesselden, on a young gentleman who was born blind, or lost his sight so early, that he had no recollection of ever having seen, and was couched between thirteen and fourteen years of age.*

"When he first saw, he was so far from making any

judgment about distances, that he thought all objects whatever touched his eyes (as he expressed it), as what he felt did his skin; and thought no objects so agreeable as those which were smooth and regular, though he could form no judgment of their shape, or guess what it was in any object that was pleasing to him; he knew not the shape of anything, nor any one thing from another; but upon being told what things were, whose form he knew before from feeling, he would carefully observe that he might know them again; but having too many objects to learn at once, he forgot many of them, and as he said, at first, learned to know, and forgot again a thousand things in a day. One particular I will relate: having often forgotten which was the cat and which the dog, he was ashamed to ask; but catching the cat (which he knew by feeling) he was observed to look at her steadfastly, and then setting her down, said, 'So, Puss! I shall know you another time.'

"He was very much surprised that those things which he had liked best did not appear most agreeable in his eyes; expecting those persons would appear most beautiful whom he loved most, and such things to be most agreeable to his sight that were so to his taste. We thought he soon knew what pictures represented; but we found afterwards, we were mistaken; for about two months after he was couched, he discovered all at once that they represented solid bodies; whereas to that time he considered them only as party-coloured planes, or surfaces diversified with variety of paint; but even then he was no less surprised, expecting the pictures would feel like the things they represented; and was amazed when he found those parts, which by their light and shadow appeared round and uneven, felt flat like the rest; and he asked what was the *lying* sense, feeling or seeing?

"Being shown his father's picture in a locket at his mother's watch, and told what it was, he acknowledged it a likeness, but was vastly surprised, asking how it

could be that a large face could be expressed in so little room; saying it should have seemed as impossible to him, as to put a bushel of anything into a pint. At first he could bear but very little sight, and the things he saw he thought extremely large; but on seeing things larger, those first seen he conceived less, never being able to imagine any lines beyond the bounds he saw; the room he was in, he said, he knew to be but part of the house; yet he could not conceive that the whole house could look bigger. Before he was couched he expected little advantage from seeing worth undergoing an operation for, except reading and writing; for he said he thought he could have no more pleasure in walking abroad than he had in the garden, which he could do very safely and readily. And even blindness, he observed, had this advantage, that he could go anywhere in the dark much better than those who can see; and after he had seen, he did not soon lose this quality, nor desire a light to go about the house in the night. He said every new object was a new delight, and the pleasure was so great, that he wanted ways to express it; but his gratitude to his operator he could not conceal; never seeing him for some time without tears of joy in his eyes, and other marks of affection; and if he did not happen to come at any time when he was expected, he would be so grieved that he could not forbear crying at his disappointment.

"A year after first seeing, being carried upon Epsom Downs, and observing a large prospect, he was exceedingly delighted with it, and called it a new kind of seeing.

"And now, being lately couched of his other eye, he says that objects at first appeared large to this eye, but not so large as they did at first to the other; and looking upon the same object with both eyes, he thought it looked about twice as large as with the first couched eye only, but not double, that we can discover."

LECTURE VI.

Day of Judgment.

In pursuing the regular course of our inquiries, we proceed naturally from the consideration of the Resurrection, to that of the final Judgment which immediately follows. Of the many places in Scripture which relate to that event, there is one in the fifth chapter of the Apostle Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians, to which I particularly wish to call your attention: because in studying the passage as a *whole*, you will perceive the importance of the rule I have so often insisted on; that of not interpreting single texts by themselves, but judging of them partly by the general drift and tenour of the whole discourse (examining what goes before and what follows), and partly from a comparison of one passage with another, so as to reconcile each part of Scripture with the rest.

Take, for example, the words of the tenth verse (which are those most frequently quoted), by themselves, and they will not only afford no indication of any such doctrine as a bodily resurrection, but would seem rather to imply the contrary: "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body:" here, our present state in this world is spoken of, as "*in the body*;" and there is nothing in the passage to lead us to suppose that we shall have bodies when we appear before Christ's judgment-seat; the two conditions,—that of being "in the body," and that in which we shall "appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,"—seem opposed and contrasted to one another. And if you look at some of the preceding verses, they would seem rather to imply of themselves; that the Apostle is speaking of a separate state, without a body: "knowing," says he, "that whilst we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord, we are willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord: where-

fore we labour that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him:" and then follow the words, "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of the things done in the body."

This passage would, I say, of itself, seem to relate to the condition of the soul separate from the body; and indeed some commentators have referred to it as regarding the separate state. But they should have remembered that the Apostle is most evidently alluding to the state, whatever it is, in which we are to *appear before Christ's judgment-seat;* so that if we are *then* to have bodies, he cannot be supposed, without a very forced and harsh interpretation, to be speaking of a *separate* state, in the words immediately preceding.

And if you look yet a little further back, Paul himself furnishes a ready interpretation of his own expression here: "We know," says he, "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God,—a house not made with hands—eternal in the heavens."

That is, when the bodies in which we now dwell are destroyed (which he calls *tents* or *tabernacles*, to indicate that they are not our *lasting* and final habitations; a tent being only a *temporary* residence, which, after a time, is taken down and removed), we have another dwelling provided for us,—a *permanent* habitation (which may therefore be more properly styled a "*house*"), namely, immortal bodies, in which we shall be clothed at the resurrection. And shortly after he adds, "We, that are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened" (labouring, that is, under the infirmities, temptations, and imperfections to which our earthly bodies are subject); "not that we would be *unclothed*, but clothed upon: that mortality might be swallowed up by life." Here, having spoken of the burden of that corruptible body which we now inhabit, he adds this caution, on purpose, as it seems, to guard against the supposition that the deliverance he looks for from this burden, is a separate state of the soul: what we desire, he says, is, "*not* to be *un*-clothed" (namely, as in a *separate* state), but the

hope we cherish is, he says, "to be *clothed upon*," that is, to have an addition made to what we now possess, by being placed in a far superior habitation,—by having "our vile bodies made like unto Christ's glorious body." And these our glorified bodies are to be of so refined and purified a nature in comparison of what we now have, as to be called by him in another epistle* "spiritual bodies;" for "flesh and blood," says he (that is, such gross materials as our present flesh and blood), "cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven."

And when you observe that, in *that* very passage where he says that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven," he is distinctly teaching that Christians shall, nevertheless, in that kingdom of heaven, *have bodies* (though very different from what they have now), you may easily perceive how he comes in this place also to speak of being "absent from the body and present with the Lord," when he is speaking not of a *separate* state, but of absence from *such* a body,

* 1 Corinthians, xv.

of gross flesh and blood, as we now dwell in. The body in which he speaks of the Christian as being "at home," whilst he is "absent from the Lord," is evidently that "earthly *tabernacle*" which he has just before spoken of as a burden; and the deliverance from that burden (of which he holds out the encouraging hope) is, not being "*un*clothed,"—not a *separate* state,—but the condition of being "clothed upon;" namely, with our spiritual and eternal body. If, therefore, the commentators I alluded to, had studied the *whole* passage *as* a *whole*, they would clearly have perceived, I think, that whatever may *be* the state of the soul between death and the final resurrection, nothing is here *revealed* concerning it; nor is the Apostle at all alluding to *that*, but to the state in which we shall "appear before the judgment-seat of Christ."

The Day of this final Judgment after the resurrection, whatever may, in fact, become of men in the meantime, is the only thing ever alluded to in Scripture, when the object is either to encourage, or to awaken and alarm men;—to comfort

them concerning those that *sleep*, or on the other hand (as the Apostle expresses it, in the very next verse to the one above quoted), "knowing the *terrors* of the Lord, to persuade men."

Concerning the particulars, however, of this great Day, the Scriptures afford us but scanty information; though they give us the most positive assurances that it *will* take place, and instruct us, how, and when, to prepare for it. Yet even the little that *is* revealed on the subject it would be easy to misinterpret, if any one were to take some single passage by itself, and judge from *that* alone without calling in the aid of Scripture to limit and modify,—to fill up and explain it.

Take, for example, this text: "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad:" what can be plainer, a man might say (from a view of this passage *alone*), than that a man's final salvation or condemnation at the day of judgment de-

pends entirely upon the *actions* he has performed—the *deeds done*—in this world, without any regard to his faith,—without any consideration of the motives on which he acted, which are not mentioned here,—without piety or any sense of religion being taken into account at all? And thence he might infer (as some have actually done), that all kinds of faith, and all kinds of principle, are equally acceptable, or rather, equally indifferent, to the Almighty; and that all we have to do, is, to take care of the external conduct. Again, on the other hand, let any one take, by itself, our Lord's parting declaration to his disciples, after the command given them to preach the Gospel, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." From this, he might say, it is evident that good works are of no consequence at all, and that every one who has *belief*, and is admitted into the Church by baptism, is sure of salvation, whatever kind of life he may lead.

Thus you see (as I have before observed), that single texts of Scripture

may be so interpreted, if not compared together, and explained by each other, as to contradict one another, and to be each one of them at variance with the truth. The Scriptures, if so studied, will no less mislead you than if they were actually false; for *half the truth* will very often amount to absolute falsehood. If Scripture be interpreted *by* Scripture, it will appear plainly, that Jesus is speaking of that kind of faith which shows itself in an obedience to his commands,—of believing in such a manner as to *act agreeably* to that belief; even as Abraham did, of whom it is recorded, that "he believed in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness," because in conformity with his belief, he *obeyed* God's commands; and who is accordingly cited by Paul as an example of a man "justified by *faith*," and by James, of a man "justified by *works*;" the faith being manifested by the works, which sprung out of it. In like manner, Paul, in the passage before us, is only reminding the Corinthians, that the encouragement he has just been holding out to them, of quitting this earthly

tabernacle for the immortal habitation of a glorified body, is not an encouragement held out to *all*, nor to all who call themselves Christians; but to those only who shall be found acceptable before their Judge at the last day; on which they will have to render an exact account of the life they have led. He had no need to caution them against supposing that the actual deeds performed were all that would be taken into account. No reader or hearer of this Apostle could need to be warned, that it is only for the sake of Christ's meritorious sacrifice, and through faith in Him, that our endeavours after virtue can be accepted; and that "without Him we can do nothing," since it is God that "worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure;" since *these* doctrines he had been inculcating in every page, and in every variety of expression.

Universally, with respect to the nature of the examination we are to undergo,—the principles on which we are to be judged,—any one may easily be misled by attending merely to any one single

text. Jesus himself, who, in one place, speaks merely of "belief" in Him, and of baptism, as ensuring salvation, in another place, describes the Day of Judgment so as to dwell entirely and exclusively on the neglect or fulfilment of one class of duties, the duties of benevolence; representing Himself as pronouncing a blessing on those who shall have ministered to the hungry, the naked, the sick, and the prisoners, and a curse on those who shall have withheld their charitable offices: meaning to impress on men's minds (as is evident to any who considers the general sense of Scripture), that this is one great branch of christian duty, concerning which inquiry will be made on the last day; and that although we can in reality do Him no service, yet He will, on that day, graciously consider our labour of love toward our brethren, as a benefit done to Himself, and as claiming reward at his hands. In another place, the duty of abstaining from presumptuous judgment of one another is recommended in the same manner; "Judge not, that ye be not judged;" and so also Paul, "Let no

man judge his brother; for we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." And in another place, the government of the tongue is inculcated in like manner; "Every idle word that men speak, they shall give an account thereof at the day of judgment; for by thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned;" that is, by thy words, *as well as* actions and thoughts. And, in short, almost every christian duty, in its turn, is, in some part of Scripture or other, placed in this point of view; to remind men what an awful account they must render respecting it; but without any idea of teaching that they are not to render an account of the rest also.

As for the manner in which mankind shall be tried before this awful judgment-seat, it is, of course, impossible for us to decide positively, or even conjecture clearly, respecting a transaction so totally different from all that we have experienced, or can conceive; which is not only altogether miraculous (that is, out of the common course of nature), but different

even from all other miracles that are recorded.

Among the miraculous circumstances of it, is this, that it is spoken of as taking place at *one and the same time.* I do not mean that because it is called the *day* of judgment, we are necessarily to suppose it will occupy just that portion of time which we now call a day; but it must clearly be something that can be called *some one time,* since we are told of the dead, generally, being raised *together,* at the appointed signal, and appearing *immediately,* in all their *countless generations,* before the tribunal of their great Judge, to receive their final doom; though it would take ages merely to *recite the names* of all the individuals who have lived on the earth, in christian countries alone, even up to this present time; as you may easily convince yourselves if you will make even the roughest calculation.*

* If, for instance, you suppose fifty names recited in a minute, which would be 72,000 in twenty-four hours, it would take, at this rate, not much less than a year to recite the names even of those *now living* in this country; which is but a speck compared with the whole world.

But we must remember, that as God is in all places equally at the same moment of time, and sees and knows not one thing only, at one time, as we do, but all things, at all times, so, each one of us accordingly, is at all times (even at the moment I am speaking) standing in the presence of God, open and unveiled; and is seen by Him,—as to his very inmost thoughts, no less than his outward actions, —as to all his past life, no less than what he now is;—as *perfectly* as if there were no other Being in the creation but himself;—as completely as if the same all-present Mind did not, as it does, penetrate into the secret recesses of every other human heart also, that is, or was, or will be.

So of course will it be at the Day of Judgment; each man will then, as now, appear revealed in the presence of God; with this difference only; that he will then be made to *know* and *feel* that he *is* thus displayed before his Judge; which *now*, we only *believe* (for "we walk," says Paul, "by *faith*, and not by sight"), and which the greater part of professing Christians seldom, if ever, think about;

while even the best Christians, under the burden of this their earthly tabernacle, labour hard, by earnest meditation, to fix their thoughts upon the constant presence of God. But *then*, all of us, without any effort of our own, shall clearly perceive the all-searching eye, directed, each one, as full upon himself as if he stood alone; though millions upon millions of his fellow-creatures will be at the same moment in the same condition. "*Every* eye shall see Him," says the Apostle John, "and they also who pierced Him,"—both those whose hands actually nailed him to the cross, and those who (as Paul says), by falling away, "have trodden under foot the Son of God,"—both they who deny, and they who disregard the Gospel,—all will be, at that day, witnesses, whether they will or not,—witnesses, together with the Apostles, of his glorious resurrection. *He* sees each one of us always; but then, *we* shall see *Him;* we shall no longer be "walking by faith, and not by sight," and "seeing by means of a mirror, darkly;"*

* This is the true sense of the original; "not through a glass."

none will then be so blinded as not to acknowledge, or not to think of, his immediate presence; even of those who will be ready to "call on the mountains to hide them, and on the hills to cover them" from it.

But on that great day, each man will not only see his Judge; he will also see *himself;* which is what no one *can* do perfectly at present, and which few, I fear, endeavour to do at all. Many of our words and actions, and many more of our thoughts, have completely fled from our memory; there are even many of these that we should not know to be ours, if we were reminded of them. And what is more, a great portion of men's lives and characters they *remember*, but do not rightly *estimate.* It is the study of a large portion of mankind to deceive themselves; either by silencing their conscience, or by perverting it; either by taking care to avoid judging themselves, or by aiming at, not a fair, but a favourable judgment. All self-delusion of this kind will vanish at the last day. The register of each man's thoughts, and

words, and works, is kept for him by a hand which cannot err,—which will omit nothing, and disguise nothing: and the record will on that day be presented before his eyes, complete.

And to do this,—we may well believe, though we cannot comprehend it,—to set before each man this picture of himself,—may easily be the work but of a moment. In our present state, indeed, to recall to mind, and to reflect upon, and judge of, even a small portion of one's life, occupies much time; but, then, we shall be in a different state. And our experience even here, is sufficient to convince us that no bounds can be set to the possible rapidity of thought. There are some persons to whom it occasionally happens, that at some particular moments, the events of many past years flash across the mind, as it were, very distinctly, in a very short time; though it would take many hours to record them in words. And in the case of dreaming, it must have occurred to most of you, that now and then a long series of events, such as would occupy several weeks or

months, and such as could not even be described in a day's time, will be presented to the mind, and will appear to pass, during a sleep of perhaps less than an hour. And since thought is thus rapid,—and, to all appearance, much more so at some times than at others,—and since it is plain that there are no conceivable limits to its *possible* rapidity, we know no reason why its swiftness may not be increased ten thousand fold in a different state. It is neither impossible, nor even improbable, that in another life, a single moment may set before us a vivid, complete, distinct recollection of all that has passed in this; and that *each* may thus have as sudden, as clear, and as complete a view of his own character, as he has of his person when a glass is placed before him.

It is not unlikely, therefore, that the only witness to be summoned at this great trial of each one of us, will be, his own CONSCIENCE;—his conscience, not darkened, as now, by the imperfection of his present faculties—not perverted any longer by self-partiality—not hard-

ened by familiarity with sin;—but a conscience frightfully true, distinct, and impartial. What a picture will this present, even to the best of us! What stains will appear even in the brightest character, when *thus* viewed by the individual who owns it! The testimony which this faithful witness will then bear, in each man's cause, will be such as to make him feel humbled, and awed, and unfit, of himself, to be justified before God.

Such is the representation which the sincere Christian's conscience makes, *now; then*, it will be the same with every man; and far the most with those who are now the least impressed with the thought. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;" *then*, no one will be deceived. But the difference will be, that those who have carefully regulated and carefully obeyed their conscience *here*, will have the less ground to dread its testimony there. It will not testify, indeed, that they are *meritorious* in God's sight; but they will in this life have renounced the arrogance of trusting in their own merits,

and thrown themselves entirely on the mercies of God, in Christ; they will have said, not with their lips only, but in their hearts, and in their lives, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified:" their conscience will not deceive them by telling them that they "*have* no sins"—but they will have confessed their sins, in the only way that can obtain forgiveness, not in mere general, formal words, but with deep abhorrence of them; —*not*, as if they were to be *satisfied* with the bare confession, but with hearty desire and unceasing endeavours to shake them off; their conscience will not tell them that they are *worthy* of the mercies of Christ thus living and dying for them; but it *will* bear witness that they have "loved Him who first loved them," and have laboured in their lives to give proof of their love by "keeping his commandments." And the stains and blemishes which they will still have been bewailing and struggling to clear away, will be washed out before their eyes in the blood of the Lamb, "who taketh away the sins

of the world;" their "*faith* will make them whole."

Not so, those who shall have wanted faith in Christ, or who shall have "held the truth in unrighteousness:"—not so, those who will *then for the first time* have a faithful and a tender conscience;—who shall have put off the thoughts of the last day, till the day is come;—who shall have prided themselves in their good works, and trusted in *their* atoning efficacy; or who shall have been *content* to *confess* their sins in general terms, without labouring to escape from each one in particular; and trusted carelessly in the *mercy* of God, without thinking of the *conditions* of his mercy. Multitudes no doubt will then be found, even of those who are not ill-satisfied with themselves *now*, who will *then* wish that their time of trial were to come over again, even though they were to spend such lives of hardship, and die such deaths of torture, as the ancient martyrs. But the time for wishes will then be past; the wishes of Christ's faithful servants will then be fulfilled; and those of the disobedient will

then be vain. They will have come too LATE.

It is not, however, too late, yet! Such thoughts as may not perhaps be pleasant to some of us, will yet be profitable; *then*, they will be unprofitable; though they *must* be present, and arrayed in tenfold terrors.

Of that record of each man's life which will be completed at his death, and which will be displayed before him at his final trial,—a portion (I cannot tell how long or short) is yet unfinished: the past is out of our power; but what will the record of the remaining part of your life contain? This is no question of speculative curiosity; for it depends on you what it *shall* contain. To-morrow, if you live till then,—to-morrow, another day will have been taken from the sum of that future which is in your power, and added to the irretrievable past;—enrolled, with the rest of your life, in that unerring record, which will hereafter be placed before you. Strive, therefore, earnestly, that the remainder of your life, from this moment, may be better than

what has gone before, whether that be good or bad. Place God always before you, *now;* since, *then,* He *will* be before you; and for that purpose apply to Him constantly for the grace of his Holy Spirit, which is never sought in vain if it be sought in time; and say—(now that there *is* time for it)—say, not with your lips only, but with your heart, and in your future conduct, "in the hour of death, and in the Day of Judgment, good Lord, deliver us!"

LECTURE VII.*

Expected Restoration of the Jews; and the Millennium.

BEFORE I proceed to offer any remarks on the final condition of men in the next world, it will be necessary to say a few words relative to the events which some persons expect are to take place before the Day of Judgment; or during the very continuance of it. And some of you, therefore, may perhaps wonder that I should not have noticed these matters earlier, before the mention of the resurrection. My reasons, however, for not having done so, you will presently perceive.

The notions I allude to, which have been formed by some Christians from their mode of interpreting certain passages of Scripture, are these: that before

* For the greater part of the matter of this Lecture, the Author is indebted to a friend (Bp. Hinds) well known by his own publications on religious subjects. See Eden's Theological Dictionary, Art. MILLENNIUM.

the end of the world the whole body of unbelieving Jews are to be converted to Christianity,—are to be collected in their own country,—and are there to enjoy a superior degree of divine favour, as being restored to the privileges of God's peculiar People; blest, in a higher degree than ever, with wealth and temporal prosperity; that Jerusalem is to be restored to all its ancient magnificence, and even much greater; and that Jesus Christ is to reign there, in bodily presence, for a thousand years.* Moreover, that when He shall come on earth for this purpose, He will first raise from the dead his saints; that is, all truly good Christians, who shall have died before that time; and that these, together with the converted Jews, will reign with Him in great worldly splendour till the end of the thousand years; when the rest of the dead will be raised; and that the saints, together with Christ, will then pass judgment on them.

* This period of time has hence been called MILLENNIUM, which is a Latin word, signifying space of one thousand years.

I do not mean that all who hold *any* of these opinions, must of course hold *every* one of them just as here stated: on the contrary, there is a great diversity of opinion, as to particular points, among those who, on the whole, take some such general view of the subject as I have laid before you. It would be foreign from my purpose to enter on an examination of all these particulars, and to discuss the various interpretations which different persons have given of almost every one of the passages of Scripture that have been thought to relate to this question. The whole system, of which I have given a general sketch, the best I am able, appears to me founded on a misunderstanding of Scripture, and consequently to be erroneous throughout; otherwise, indeed, I should of course have treated of these points before I entered on the subject of the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment.

I will offer some observations, first, the last-mentioned of these points, namely, the expectation that the saints,

or faithful Christians, are to take a share in the general Judgment.

This, I believe, is derived chiefly, if not entirely, from a passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians (chap. vi.) But if you will attentively consider the drift of the Apostle's words, you will see that they will not warrant such a conclusion. "Can any of you bear," says he, "having a matter against another, to go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?* Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more, things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the Church. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man amongst you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the

* This is the exact force of the words of the original.

unbelievers." Now you may observe in this passage.

1st. That the Apostle is plainly making no *revelation* of a truth before hidden, but is appealing to the Corinthians themselves in respect of a well-known and well-understood fact; for his expression is, "*do ye not know*," &c.

2ndly. That under the title of *saints*, he is speaking, as indeed he always does, of *all Christians* without exception, not particularizing those of them who should persevere in leading a godly life. It is very important to observe, and to keep in mind, this use of the word "saints" in Scripture; never, to denote the more excellent Christians, as distinguished from the rest; but all who had embraced the christian faith; and who were, therefore, *dedicated* and consecrated to Christ by baptism into his name, as his holy and peculiar People; whether they lived afterwards such a life "as *becometh* saints," or, like God's peculiar People of old, the Israelites, incurred his displeasure by disobedience.*

* See Sermon on "Christian Saints."

3rdly. It should be observed (though the words of our translation would not lead the reader to suppose so) that the Apostle is not speaking of something that is to take place *hereafter*, but of something *already begun, and actually going on:* for the sense is (according to the reading of the best copies of the original), not "the saints *shall* judge the world,"—"the world *shall* be judged by you," but "the saints *judge*," &c., "the world is judged—*is being judged* by you."

All this does not look as if the Apostle were teaching that Christians of eminent piety are, at the end of the world, to sit in judgment on the rest of mankind: especially when we consider that the same Apostle repeatedly assures us "we must *all* stand before the judgment-seat of Christ;" and that Christ Himself, under the figure of the sheep and the goats (Matthew xxv.), speaks of his pronouncing sentence, on the last day, on the good and the bad. He makes no mention of any such thing (which, in itself, is surely a strange and unlikely thing) as the good being first separated from the

bad, and afterwards sitting to judge them; —to judge, that is, those whose condemnation was already pronounced *by the very circumstance of the separation.*

A more reasonable interpretation, therefore, of this passage seems to be that which was adopted by some of the most ancient Divines ;* to whom the more attention is due in a question of this kind, because they used the Greek language, in which Paul wrote, and were accustomed probably to the use of the same words in the same sense in which he employs them. They understand the Apostle to mean by the word which we translate "judge," the same as "condemn." Any one who takes the right course, by so doing, condemns,—in the New-Testament language, "judges,"—those who, with equal opportunities, chuse the wrong. This was the case with the Corinthian Christians (or saints); who, by embracing the Gospel, judged (in this sense) their unbelieving neighbours, to whom it had been proposed, and who rejected it; they had set these an example of faith which they

* Namely, Chrysostom and others.

had not followed; and they also, as far as they conformed their lives to the spirit of the Gospel, condemned and put to shame by their example the gross vices of those who continued pagans. Of course, therefore, they might well be expected to be able to decide fairly between any of their brethren who might have a dispute.

It is still more likely, however, that the Apostle had also in his mind that "right judgment," or *discernment*, between good and evil, which the Holy Spirit is ready to bestow on those Christians who seek his aid. This is alluded to in the 13th, 14th, and 15th verses of the 2nd chapter of this Epistle. "He that is spiritual judgeth all things," &c. Such a man, therefore, must be competent to pronounce a just *decision* in any case of right and wrong, besides pronouncing, by his good conduct, a *condemnation* of evil-doers.

It is in this latter sense, evidently, that our Lord, from whose expressions many that are used by his Apostles seem to have been borrowed, speaks of the men of Nineveh rising in *judgment* against

that generation and condemning it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and the Queen of the South, because she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Not that He meant, or was ever understood to mean, that these persons would themselves take a share in the final judgment; but that their conduct would be a condemnation of the unbelieving generation, who rejected one greater than Jonas, and than Solomon. Here, indeed, He uses the word "condemn" as well as "judge;" but this last is often employed by the sacred Writers to imply the other; as, for example (Romans ii. 3), "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" and so in many other places. And not only had Jesus used the expression in this sense, but He had used it even with reference to the very subject the Apostle is speaking of to the Corinthians,—the judgment of the world (that is, the sinful unbelieving world, of which Satan is

called in Scripture the "Ruler") and of Angels, namely, "the Devil and his angels." And hence it is that Paul addresses the Corinthians as *knowing*, from their knowledge of what Jesus Himself had declared, the truth of what he is saying to them. In John xii. 31, we read that Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now" (that is, immediately, very soon) "shall the prince of this world be judged." Chapter xvi. ver. 11, contains the fuller and more explicit statement of that promise. "The Comforter," He told his disciples, "shall convince the world .... of Judgment; because the prince of this world is judged." The Judgment of the world, or of the world's Ruler, then, was to be a part of the Comforter's agency; it was through the Holy Spirit's influence that the dominion of Sin and Satan was to be condemned and destroyed. And this is precisely and plainly Paul's meaning. "Know ye not," he writes, "that the saints" (that is, those who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit;—those through whom the Comforter was manifested—) "judge the world?" ....

"In you (for this is precisely the sense of the original; not *by* you) . . . in you the world is judged," &c.; that is, it is by the Holy Spirit dwelling *in* you, and by the faith and goodness, which are its fruits, shown in your lives, that the world is judged,—the evil Spirit which dwells in it,—and its unbelief and unrighteousness condemned.

It does not appear, then, from this passage of the Apostle, that he was teaching the Corinthians to expect that the saints should at the last day sit in judgment on the rest of mankind. Nor is there anything in any other part of Scripture to establish such an expectation; but rather the reverse.

II. You will find, on attentive examination, as little reason for thinking that this Apostle teaches us to expect a resurrection of pious Christians before the general resurrection.

Many mistakes as to the sense of Scripture have arisen from the reader's taking a single sentence, or even part of a sentence, by itself, without any regard to the context, and to the general drift of the

writer. Thus, in respect of the present question, there is a single clause in the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, which might of itself seem to favour the notion of two resurrections (chap. iv. ver. 16); "the dead in Christ shall rise first." But if you examine the whole passage, you will see at once that Paul is not speaking of any precedence in resurrection which those that *rise to happiness* are to have over the rest of the dead (for the original will not bear this sense); but of the *dead* (as opposed to the *living* Christians), being raised up, before those faithful servants of Christ who shall be alive at his coming, shall receive their summons to meet him. The Thessalonians (as I observed in a former Lecture) seem to have had some doubts on this point, which the Apostle takes care to remove; by assuring them that they who "are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent (that is, have precedence of) them that are asleep;" on the contrary, "the dead in Christ shall rise first;* then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up

* πρῶτον: if he had meant that they should rise before others, he must have written πρῶτοι.

together with them," &c. He is plainly speaking, not of "the dead *in Christ*," as distinguished from those who are *not* in Christ; but of "the *dead* in Christ," as distinguished from the *living*.

Another text, which has perhaps gone some way to favour the same notion, is in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xv. ver. 23, 24, "Each in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; then they who are Christ's at his coming; then cometh the end," &c.

Here again, if you look to the general drift of what the Apostle is saying, you will at once see that his object was to remove any doubt as to the resurrection of Christ's faithful servants; any doubt, I mean, which might arise from our seeing that they are not, like Him, raised *immediately* after death. The Apostle, accordingly, illustrates the difference between the Lord's resurrection and theirs, by the image of the first-fruits of the harvest, and the harvest itself. The first-fruits were indeed gathered *before* the rest of the corn:—but they were the pledge and earnest of a general gathering: the

remaining ears were no less certainly reserved for one great and common reaping. This taking place, then all is over —"then cometh the end."

III. I believe, however, that it is chiefly from the twentieth and twenty-first chapters of the Book of Revelation, that the expectations have been drawn of a literal resurrection from the dead of pious Christians before the final resurrection,—their splendid reign with Christ in person for a thousand years,—the literal restoration of Jerusalem, &c.

Now, I must confess, I am very much disinclined to this interpretation of Scripture, from the nature of the case;—from finding such views as these at variance (as I shall presently show) with the general character of the Christian-religion. But, setting aside, for the present, all these considerations, let us look merely to the passage itself, and see whether there are not strong reasons for concluding that it is to be understood, not literally, but figuratively.

First, then, you should consider that

this book is professedly, and throughout, prophetical; like those more ancient prophecies, which foretold the coming of the Christ. It is evidently fashioned on the model of the Book of Daniel.

Secondly, it should be remembered, that it is part of the character of the Scripture-prophecies not to be so framed as to be fully understood before the event. This is, I conceive, what the Apostle Peter means, when he says that prophecy is not (in the words of our translation) "of private interpretation." I am not sure what sense our translators meant to convey by those words; but the signification of the original words used by Peter, evidently is, that "Prophecy is *not to be its own interpreter*;" that is, is not to have its full sense made out (like that of any other kind of composition) by the study of the very words of each prophecy itself, but it is to be interpreted by the event that fulfils it. When we read in Scripture or elsewhere, a history of any past transaction, or a statement of any doctrine, we may expect, generally speaking, that it shall be its own interpreter;—that

by attentively studying what the writer has said, we shall arrive at a full knowledge of his meaning. But it is not so with the greater part of the Scripture-prophecies. They are mostly so drawn up, that the events which fulfil them should be also needed to explain their meaning; and more than this; that even when fulfilled, it should be possible for the uncandid, the prejudiced, and the perverse, to miss the explanation, and to be blind to the fulfilment; while those who are humble, patient, and docile, are enabled to understand it.

This you may perceive, by looking at those prophecies in the Old Testament which have been already fulfilled; for that will be the best way of guarding against mistakes as to those which have *not* yet been fulfilled. There are, as you know, numerous types and predictions in the Old Testament relating to the Gospel. Now, if these had been so clearly framed that every reader had understood precisely what it was that was thus foreshown, in all the particulars, and that when the events took place, no one could

possibly doubt about the fulfilment, then, when Christ did come, there would have been no room for any exercise of faith in believing on Him, but all would have been *compelled* to acknowledge Him. And this does not seem to have been the design of the Almighty. He seems to have intended that the prophecies should be obscure, and imperfectly understood before their fulfilment; and that when they *were* fulfilled, they should be intelligible only to those who would "search the Scriptures" with a candid mind; while the perverse and obstinate might still have an opportunity left them of unbelief,—might have it in their power to shut their eyes against the evidence, and to make their "ears dull of hearing," so as not to "see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and be converted." (Matthew xiii. 15.)

Accordingly, though enough was declared to satisfy the Israelites of old that the Lord had in store some great deliverance for his people, by the hands of a Christ, or Anointed King, the nature of

his kingdom was not set forth in such a manner as fully to prepare them for what actually came to pass. On the contrary, most of the prophecies, *if interpreted literally* (and this is a very important point for us to remember), led to the expectation of a Saviour who should work a great *temporal* deliverance for his people; —who should establish a kingdom of great worldly splendour. And such were the kind of expectations which, in consequence, were generally entertained.

When, therefore, Jesus Christ came, the uncandid and bigoted, for this reason, rejected him; while the humble and honest-hearted were gradually brought to understand that his "kingdom is not of this world," and that the prophecies of his triumphs and dominion are to be understood figuratively and spiritually. And thus they received the reward of their faith: by which word is to be understood, not blind credulity, but openness to rational conviction;—not a disposition to believe without good evidence, but a readiness to weigh the evidence fairly, and decide according to it, however strange

and unexpected and unwelcome may be the conclusion it leads to.

Now had those predictions been fulfilled, literally, in the manner expected by most of the Jews, there could, as I have said, have been no trial of this faith. For example, it had been foretold by Malachi, that "Elias must come" (Malachi iv. 5) before the Christ; and by Daniel, that the sign of the Son of Man should appear in Heaven. The Jews, naturally enough, expected that Elias (Elijah), who, they knew, had been visibly removed from the earth in a fiery chariot (2 Kings ii.), should return in person with the same splendid appearance (Matthew xvii. 10): and that when the Christ should come, He should appear openly "in the clouds of Heaven," and deliver them from the Gentiles, and establish a splendid kingdom on earth. Had these things taken place *all* men would have been forced into belief. But though it was necessary that these prophecies *should* be fulfilled, it was so provided that the uncandid and bigoted, who would listen to nothing that did not agree with their own expectations,

should be able so to blind themselves as not to "discern the signs of the times;" while the eye of honest and patient faith penetrated beyond the veil, and saw the prophecies fulfilled; though in a manner the most unexpected. "None of the wicked will understand; but the wise will understand" (Daniel xii. 10). John the Baptist, they at length understood, had come as another Elias (Luke i. 17), calling the Israelites who had sinned (as the real Elijah of old did) to return to the Lord. And the Son of Man came with no visible glory, save the working of such miracles as "no man can do, except God be with him:" reserving his splendid triumph over all enemies till the final consummation of all things;—showing himself in glory only to three disciples in private; submitting to indignities and to a degrading death; and establishing an humble, a despised, and persecuted kingdom,—a spiritual kingdom that "came not with observation," but was "within" the hearts of his followers. And instead of making (as many prophecies had seemed plainly to declare) the Mosaic law perpetual, in

the literal observance of it, and setting the Jews above all nations of the earth, Jesus, on the contrary, changed the Law which "had a shadow of good things to come," into the Gospel, which had been figuratively and obscurely signified by the ceremonies of the Law; and "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers," making the Gentiles "children of Abraham by faith," and the adopted "Israel of God." All this *enabled* and *induced* the perverse and self-willed to reject the Christ when he appeared.

Surely it is not too much to say "all these things happened unto them for examples, and are written for our admonition." It is indeed declared in the Book of Revelation that certain saints shall rise before the general resurrection, &c.; but no less plainly was it declared to the Jews of old that Elias should come before the Messiah, who should Himself appear in the clouds. Is it not likely that there is an agreement between these two prophecies? I mean, that as the one had a figurative and spiritual signification, so also has the other; and

moreover, as the fulfilment of the former prophecy was not (by the greater part of the Jews) perceived, when it did take place, from their being bigoted to a literal interpretation: so also may it be with the other. It may signify, therefore, (and may be for that reason not understood by many when it comes to pass) not the literal raising of dead men, but the raising up of an increased Christian zeal and holiness;—the revival in the Christian Church, or in some considerable portion of it, of the *spirit* and *energy* of the noble martyrs of old (even as John the Baptist came in the *spirit* and power of Elias, Luke i. 17); so that Christian principles shall be displayed in action throughout the world in an infinitely greater degree than ever before: and this for a considerable time before the end of the world; though not perhaps for the literal and precise period of a thousand years.

And that this should be called a *resurrection*, is not by any means a more strange and violent figure of speech than the use of the expression "new birth,"

or regeneration, to denote the change wrought by the Holy Spirit in the Christian's heart, in order to his becoming a child of God, and heir, through Christ, to immortal life. This metaphor was, at first, very strange and unintelligible; as we see by the perplexity it occasioned to Nicodemus.

Again, as the literal coming of Elias in his flaming chariot would have compelled assent even in the most perverse,* (which was never God's design,) so, even much more, the overpowering spectacle of Christ's returning upon earth in person, and raising vast multitudes of saints from the dead, would leave no place for faith,—no room for wilful blindness; but

* This it certainly would: because, though the Jews of that day resisted the evidence of many striking miracles, this appearance of Elias was exactly what they were prepared to EXPECT, as a sign of the Messiah's coming. The same may be said of the "sign from heaven," which they were perpetually asking him for; meaning his descending from the clouds in the manner they were prepared, by Daniel's prophecy, to expect. They hardened themselves against the miracles He did display, because He did not come with the splendour and pomp they looked for; but if he had come as a great temporal prince, we cannot doubt they would have received Him.

would force belief upon all men, even the most proud and obstinate: and that, for ten centuries together; at the end of which every one would know that the end of the world was to come. If all this were to take place, that would be utterly false which is so repeatedly and earnestly declared by our Lord, that He is to come "as *a thief in the night*," and that the day of judgment is to come "as a *snare* upon all the inhabitants of the earth," even as Noah's flood did. Whereas "if the master of the house had *known* at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched," &c.

Surely the safest way of interpreting any prophecy not yet fulfilled, is to look to the case of another prophecy, which is already accomplished, and observe the analogy between the two cases. We should take warning by the example of the Jews; and endeavour to escape such mistakes as they fell into, in interpreting the prophecies relating to Christ; by being ourselves prepared to expect (what they would not admit) a figurative, rather than a literal sense in prophecy;—by not

seeking, like them (before the end of the world), "a sign from heaven" (Luke xi. 16, and Daniel vii. 13); of so palpable, and startling, and overpowering a character as to leave no exercise for faith, and no room for perverse unbelief.

I think then, that even looking to these prophecies alone, without considering beforehand what is *likely* to be found in them, they afford no ground for expecting a literal first resurrection of saints, together with the rest of the events connected with it. It is more agreeable to the general character of the Scripture-prophecies (especially those relating to Christ's kingdom), to be, in *their meaning*, spiritual, rather than earthly and carnal: in their *expression*, figurative and obscure, rather than so literal and plain that no perversity could misunderstand them.

And if you look to the rest of Scripture, —to the general character of the christian religion, you will see much stronger reasons still against those notions which I have been speaking of. And it is very important to recollect this,—that, on the one hand, the Book of Revelation is com-

fessedly the most obscure and difficult in the whole Bible; while, on the other hand, the great leading doctrines of the Gospel,—the general character and spirit of Christianity, are set forth in Scripture, as most persons would allow, (and as is evidently needful) more clearly than any thing else. Now when there are two portions of Scripture which at the first glance might seem rather at variance, is it natural and reasonable to make the most obscure and doubtful portion set aside the plain and obvious meaning of the simplest and easiest? Does not common sense dictate the very reverse? namely, to explain an obscure prophecy, such as that we have been speaking of, by the general tenor of Scripture, and according to the general character of the Christian religion, which is so frequently and so strongly set forth. Now nothing can be more at variance with this, than a literal reign of Christ, in bodily person, for a thousand years at Jerusalem,—a literal restoration of the Jews to their country; and all the other circumstances of a literal and carnal Millennium.

For, to say nothing of the point I have already mentioned, the assurances in Scripture that the end of the world will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night, which are utterly inconsistent with the notion of such a plain and palpable warning, as the restoration of Jerusalem, and all the other circumstances of such a Millennium would afford,—to say nothing of this,—is it not plain that the course of the divine dispensations would be *going back* instead of advancing, if a worldly kingdom of God were to succeed a spiritual one?—if temporal splendour and prosperity, the blessings promised to God's favoured people under the old Covenant, were to succeed and be added on to the pure and celestial glories promised under the Gospel,—such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard?" To the Israelites of old, Moses had no commission to hold out the hopes and fears of another world; but only "a land flowing with milk and honey," and long life, and victory, and other temporal rewards. But "the bringing in of a better hope" (Hebrews vii. 19) by the Gospel, taught the

Christian to "set his affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians iii. 2), and to look for a heavenly Canaan, a land of promise beyond the grave. God's kingdom of old was a kingdom of this world; but Christ's "kingdom is not of this world." And surely it would be going back to the carnal dispensation (which the Gospel set aside) to look for the establishment of a splendid and prosperous earthly kingdom at Jerusalem, for the saints, for whom "some better thing has been provided." (Hebrews xi. 40.)

If, indeed, such a temporal reign of Christ were *clearly revealed*, we should be bound to believe it; but we may fairly refuse to admit, without an especially clear revelation, a doctrine which, at first sight at least, is so much at variance with the whole character of the Gospel.

Again, the *universality* of Christ's kingdom forbids such a notion. God thought fit, of old, to manifest Himself to one peculiar nation. His "Glory," (or Shechinah) by which he manifested Himself to Moses in the bush, and at Mount Sinai, dwelt afterwards in the Temple at Jeru-

salem, to which all his worshippers were commanded to resort. It was the place which the Lord had "chosen to set his name there:" 2 Chronicles vi. and vii. (that is, his manifestation.) Next, He was, "manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy iii. 16), in Christ, who was the Emmanuel, "God with us." This presence or manifestation of God was no longer confined to one spot. Jesus Christ "*went about* doing good" (Acts x. 38), and preaching the Gospel. This was a second stage in the gradual extension of God's presence. But as it was expedient that of the Temple at Jerusalem, "not one stone shall be left upon another" (Mark xiii. 2; Luke xix. 44), so it was also "expedient" that even Jesus (the second Temple, John ii. 19—21) "should go away" from his disciples (John xvi. 7), that He might "come again unto them" (John xiv. 28) in a third manifestation, that of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Church (that is, the whole body of Christians), which is thence called "the Temple of the Holy Ghost." (1 Corinthians, vi. 19.) Why was this "*expedient?*"

Evidently, because an individual man, as Jesus was, could not be constantly approached by all Christians in all parts of the world. Had He remained on earth even to this hour, there must have been millions who could never have come near Him. Whereas, his presence in the Spirit, renders Him universally accessible, by all alike; for He has promised, that "where two or three are gathered together in his name, there is He in the midst of them." (Matthew xviii. 20.) And thence it is that He told the woman of Samaria, that "the time was at hand when men should neither at Jerusalem, nor on Mount Gerizim, worship the Father, but should worship him in Spirit and in truth" (John iv. 21, 22); that is, not through the means of any outward *emblem* or *sign* of his presence, such as the sacred flame or Shechinah, but in the *truth* or *reality* of his nature, as a "Spirit," present everywhere equally in the soul or spirit of his faithful servants.

For Christ therefore to return in bodily person to the earth, and reign at Jerusalem, or in any other place, would be to

go back to an earlier and more imperfect stage of the divine dispensation. We ought to be satisfied, and much more than satisfied, at our Lord's presence in the Spirit; as being far more "expedient for us," than if He were present in the flesh. We have no need, and be assured Christians never will have need, to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship their Lord; for "if any man will keep his saying, He will come unto him, and make his abode with him." (John xiv. 23.)

Then again, as to the restoration of the Jews and of Jerusalem, many indeed and glorious are the promises to this effect which are found in Scripture, but they are not so numerous, nor so strongly expressed, as the declarations of the everlasting duration of the Mosaic Law; and *these*, all Christians are agreed, must be understood, not literally, but figuratively and spiritually;—not of the actual typical ceremonies, the "meats and drinks, and carnal ordinances" of the Law (Hebrews ix. 10; x. 1), which "had a shadow of good things to come," but of the glorious realities of the Gospel. I won-

der, therefore, how any Christians can doubt that those other declarations and promises also, relate to the "Jerusalem which is *above*, which is the *mother of us all*" (Galatians iv. 26);—to us, the Christian Church, which is "the Israel of God;"—the adopted "sons of Abraham (Romans iv. 16) by faith," "the children of God and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians iii. 7, 29.) The Christian Church succeeds the Jewish in the divine favour and in all its privileges, and in much greater than those. The Jews-by-nature are not indeed excluded from this Church; they are invited to enter it, and to partake of these glorious privileges: their Heavenly Father "entreated" them, and still entreats them, to come to the feast made for his prodigal son returned (the Gentiles who had wandered far away from God): but they are "angry, and will not come in" (Luke xv.); they are jealous at seeing those called "at the eleventh hour" (Matthew xx.) made equal to themselves. For it is a fundamental principle of the Gospel (and this it is that made the Jews

of old so averse to it, and so particularly malignant against Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, Acts xxii. 21), that in it there is no national distinction, — no "middle wall of partition" (Ephesians ii. 14) between Jew and Gentile; but all are admitted to equal privileges: "There is neither Jew nor Greek (1 Corinthians, xii. 13), there is neither bond nor free; if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." (2 Corinthians, v. 17.)

It is usual to speak of the restoration of "the Jews;" meaning by that name the *unbelieving* Jews of these days: but why are they more properly "the Jews" than the Apostles and those "many thousands"* who believed? (Acts xxi. 20.) And how can we suppose that any superior advantage should be reserved for those who still reject Christ, over those who received Him? That would be to hold out a reward for obstinacy. The unbelievers were indeed the *majority* of the nation; but that does not more properly make them "the Jews" to whom

* Many *myriads*, that is, tens of thousands, is the expression in the original.

God's promises were made, than the believers. On the contrary, God's promises are made and fulfilled, to the obedient, whether many or few. God promised (and fulfilled his promise), to bring the Israelites of old out of the "house of bondage," into the land promised to their Fathers: yet of that whole generation, only two men (besides the Tribe of Levi), Caleb and Joshua, entered that land, while the rest, about six hundred thousand, "entered not in, because of unbelief." (Heb. iii. 19.) But these two men, together with the children of the rest, were reckoned as the *nation of Israel*, and received the fulfilment of the promise.

Now the Apostles and those Jews who believed through them, answer to Caleb and Joshua. But many are apt to forget that the earliest christian Church, by several years, and from which all other Churches were offsets, was the Church at Jerusalem, which for a considerable time consisted of Jews alone. If therefore it had been designed that Jewish Christians should enjoy any superior privileges to us Gentiles, *that* Church, the first-fruits

of the Gospel, would surely have been so distinguished. (See Acts xv. 7—11.)

The 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, though relating to the conversion of the unbelieving Jews, I hardly need advert to, because it contains no mention of a Millennium, or allusion to any thing of that kind. Whatever connexion between the two subjects there may actually be, the Apostle does not, at least in this place, notice any.

The passage is one that is generally confessed to be obscure and of doubtful interpretation;* but the discussion of it would be foreign to my present purpose.

* The principal obscurity perhaps consists in this; that when the Apostle is apparently holding out a hope of the ultimate conversion and salvation of "all Israel," it is not clear in what sense, or with what modification, the word "all" is to be taken. He could not, one would suppose, mean it to include all the Jews who were at that time living; nor all those many millions of them who, through more than fifty generations since, have lived and died in unbelief.

But it is important to observe that the greater part of the obscure passages in Scripture are those that relate to other persons, and to things not intimately connected with our *own* affairs. Whatever most concerns *us*, practically, is for the most part,—blessed be God!—the plainest and freest from doubt.

since it is at least sufficiently plain what the Apostle is *not* speaking of; viz. he does *not* mention any temporal reign of Jesus for a thousand years, at Jerusalem or elsewhere; nor any superiority that converted Jews are to possess over Gentiles.

There are other interpretations of the prophecies I have been speaking of; which though open to great, and I think insuperable, difficulties, yet are far from deserving censure as hostile to the spirit of Christianity, because they do not involve those three doctrines which I have been protesting against: (1) that the Jews by race are, when converted to Christianity, to have some spiritual advantage over Gentile Christians, and are to be "God's People" in a superior degree: (2) that Christianity is to become a *local* religion, (as the Jewish was of old) by having some one *place* on earth "which the Lord shall chuse to set his Name there," and where the Lord Jesus is to dwell, (either in bodily person or in the Shechinah) to be visited by pious pilgrims: and (3) that true believers are to enjoy in this world

a kingdom of earthly splendour, wealth, and power;—in short, that Christ's kingdom is to become one "of this world."

All these doctrines are distinctly disavowed by those interpreters I am now speaking of. They hold that the Jews in their *unconverted state* are to return to their own land, to re-possess Jerusalem, to rebuild their Temple, and re-establish the temple-worship;—that they are afterwards to be assailed by enemies, and to undergo a siege even more dreadful than that under Titus;—that the Lord Jesus is then to come from Heaven in bodily person,—overthrow their enemies, and convert all the Israelites-by-race to the Gospel; and that then He is to remove to Heaven all sincere Christians except those converted Israelites; who are to be employed, during the next thousand years, in converting all the Heathen.

These, and several other particulars, some persons conceive themselves to see clearly foretold; either from having more acuteness than myself, or a less degree of timorous caution in interpreting unfulfilled Prophecy.

One great difficulty attending this scheme of interpretation, is, that it represents the great topic of *consolation and encouragement* held out by the Prophets, as having its fulfilment in the *restoration of the Levitical system* of worship. Now most of the sacrifices under the Law were *typical* of Christ, (as is fully and strongly set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews and elsewhere,) and implied that the Christ is *not yet come.* Consequently, all that *was* before his coming an acceptable service, would now be a continual *denial* of the claim of Jesus of Nazareth. It would be not merely an *un*-christian, but a distinctly *anti*-christian worship. Now surely it is strange, that the prophecies designed for the support and consolation of God's People, should relate to the restoration of the Jews *under a delusion,* and to a standing *protest* against Christianity.

It is strange, too, that the unbelieving Jews should be represented as nearly *right* in their interpretations of the prophecies respecting the Messiah.

We know that the whole, or very nearly

the whole, of the nation looked for a temporal deliverance,—for a Christ who should be a triumphant conqueror, to deliver them out of the hands of their temporal enemies. We know that it was this strong expectation *that led most of them to reject* Jesus; and that they were buoyed up, especially during the last siege, with the hope of a Christ coming to deliver them; and that this character was claimed by several pretenders, who accordingly all obtained numerous followers.

Now, according to the above scheme, Christ *is* to come as a victorious temporal deliverer of the Jews, and is to fulfil the prophecies just in the sense in which *they* have always understood them. If so, those who rejected Jesus were, on the whole, nearly right in their interpretation of the prophecies, and were only mistaken as to *the time;* which is very much what the Jews hold at this day.

But there is no need to enter fully into an examination of this scheme, because it seems to have no *practical* import relating to *us*. If the unconverted Jews are

destined to regain their country, and restore the temple-worship, *we* are not called on either to aid or to oppose them. If they are to be miraculously rescued from their besiegers, *we* are not to interfere.

And the argument, that, because such and such passages of Scripture *must* mean *some*thing, therefore we are bound to adopt the interpretation offered, unless we can produce a better; this does not hold good, except where there is some *practical* step to be taken. In the government of a country, in the navigation of a ship, in the treatment of a sick person, and in numberless other transactions of human life, it is indispensably *necessary* to resolve on the course to be taken; and that immediately; even though there may be strong objections against every one that can be proposed. We *must*, *practically*, decide as well as we can; though after all we may not feel complete confidence, nor have any just ground for confidence, in the decision made. If we have lost our way in the snow, or are overtaken by a flood, to stand still would be certain destruction; we *must* therefore fix at once

on what seems the most likely way of escape, though still doubtful whether we have fixed on the best. But it is quite otherwise in questions unconnected with practice; such as that, for instance, which some are now discussing, as to the plurality of worlds. It cannot be more certain that such and such a passage of scripture must mean *some*thing, than it is that the planets, Mercury and Venus for instance, either are or are not inhabited. But though one or the other of these suppositions must be true, we are not bound to adopt either of them, if we see objections to each which we cannot get over; because the question is one which can hardly be thought to concern us practically.

Some, however, will perhaps say, that all the Scriptures, including the prophecies, being written for our instruction, we are bound to interpret them in some sense or other, as well as we can.

But this is to leave a fearful opening to infidel objections. "According to you," an objector might urge, "God has given such obscure intimations of his meaning,

which yet *He requires you to understand* and explain,—that among the learned, there are twenty *different* schemes of interpretation; while some persons, not less intelligent and judicious, acknowledge that none of all these is satisfactory; and of the unlearned,—the great mass of Christians,—not one in fifty can be expected to understand any of them. And is this," he will say, "to be called a *revelation?* If God did mean these things to be clearly understood, and perfectly known, why did He not reveal them in such a manner that at least men of ordinary good sense and candour could understand and agree in the meaning?"

It is worth observing, too, that if we look to the *fulfilled* prophecies of our Lord's coming, they were obscure and doubtful *till* they were fulfilled. However plain they may appear to us now, it is certain that the whole, or very near the whole, of the Jewish people *mistook their meaning*, and that the greater part of them rejected the Christ when He did come, precisely *because* He did not *fulfil the expectations* which they had founded

on their interpretation of the prophecies. Some few, very cautious, men, among them, perhaps said within themselves, "God has promised us a deliverer; but what kind of a deliverer he will be, and what will be the blessings he is to bring, we cannot clearly see; we will patiently wait the event."

And others again, like most of the disciples, though they had formed expectations of a temporal Messiah, yielded humbly and candidly to the evidence of Christ's miracles, and submitted to learn from Him. When He did come, then a *practical* question arose. *Before* his coming there was nothing to be *done*, in consequence of interpreting the prophecies this way or that. But when a person appeared who was supposed to be the Christ, then it became a *duty* to examine his claims, and either reject Him as an impious impostor, or acknowledge and submit to Him as from Heaven. And as soon as men were thus called on to *act*, observe what a *blaze* of light is bestowed, in contrast to the faint *twilight* which prevailed before, when nothing

practical was involved. Jesus wrought such miracles that his opponents were compelled to refer them to the agency of demons. None but the obstinately prejudiced could have any doubt of his divine mission.

And this is just of a piece with the general character of God's teaching. Speculative matters are touched on slightly and obscurely; but practical questions are made plain to every candid mind.

The prophecies concerning Christ's coming were, *before* He did come, very obscure; and the right interpretation of them was not necessary for practice: *after* He was come, and when they were *fulfilled*, the right interpretation of them became a matter of the highest *practical* importance; and then, the event made them clear to every fair inquirer.

"We have" (says Peter; for that doubtless is the sense of the passage) "the word of prophecy confirmed" [viz., by the event fulfilling it]: "for no prophecy is to be interpreted by the words themselves in which it is written." [γραφης

ἰδιάς επιλυσεως] (but by the *event*), "for it came not by man's device," [*i.e.*, if men had been left to their own judgment, they would have probably foretold things quite plainly,] "but as they were moved by the Spirit of God" [whose decree was, that the clear and full understanding of the predictions should *not* take place at the time when they were uttered].

As for the supposed necessity of interpreting all prophecies *literally* that can possibly bear a literal sense, this would be at least intelligible and consistent, if it were extended to the *perpetual obligation* of the *Mosaic Law*, which is much oftener and more strongly declared than the restoration of the Jews. And accordingly it is a fundamental point of faith with the Jews at this day. But almost all Christians deny the literal interpretation of *those* declarations; and yet some of them insist on the necessity, universally, of adhering to a literal interpretation. This, surely, is neither consistent nor fair. If a man says, "I think—for such and such reasons—that *this* passage is to be taken literally, and

that, figuratively," he is at least intelligible. But he must not say this interpretation must be the right one, *because* it is the literal, unless he will carry out the principle all through.

But it is remarkable that the scheme in question *introduces* a figurative sense of some passages which are *usually understood literally*. For, certainly the plain literal sense of the words, "God hath appointed a *Day* in which He will judge all men," (and many others to the same effect) is, that there is to be *one Day* of Judgment. It *may* mean that there are to be (as by the above scheme) *two* Days of Judgment; but one can hardly say that this is the *literal* as opposed to the figurative sense.

But, indeed, if we suppose (which I am far from denying) that there is to be an intermediate state of consciousness between death and the final resurrection, it is only figuratively, and by a very bold figure of speech, that it can be said there is *any* Day of *Judgment* at all. Men cannot (as has been set forth in these Lectures) be literally said to be *judged*,

many years, or perhaps centuries, *after* they have actually had their reward or punishment awarded to them, and have been actually in a state of enjoyment or of suffering.

As for our being able to *know beforehand* the near *approach* of the commencement of the Millennium, and of the end of the world, some of those interpreters I have been alluding to do, and some do not, hold it.

It does seem to me completely at variance with numerous and strong declarations of our Lord; who speaks of "coming as a thief in the night:" and certainly no thief gives *warning* of his coming.

But in every century since the commencement of the Christian era, there have been predictions, from some supposed signs, of the speedy end of the world; and the falsification of all these has probably contributed not a little to bring christian teachers, generally, into disrepute, and to shake men's faith in *all* that they say. A hasty reasoner is apt to say, "Here are multitudes of men,

who from age to age have earnestly assured us of the *truth of the Gospel*, and *also* of the *speedy end* of the world; we *see* that they were utterly mistaken in the one, and therefore we may presume that they are equally so in the other. We will not deign to listen to them at all!"

No doubt, if the same predictions always continue to be given out, the *last* of them *must* be verified. But it will not follow that the authors of it were at all wiser than their predecessors.

But to those who do not pretend to fix the precise time of Christ's second coming to judge the world, I would suggest, that, since this *may* take place either five years hence, or fifty, or five hundred, or five thousand; while *our own* continuance on earth must come to an end in a very few years, this latter is the practical concern which it most behoves us to dwell on. And they should guard themselves and others against the danger which so easily besets men, of being drawn off from what is *plainly* revealed, to what is darkly hinted at; from what is of the

highest importance to us in *practice*, to matters which, though exciting to the imagination and the feelings, have little or no reference to our conduct; and from what immediately concerns *ourselves*, to speculations as to God's future dealings with some *other* nation.

If we inquire as to *our own* duties, scripture will not leave us at a loss. But if we inquire, "And *what shall this man* do?" we shall often have no other answer than, "WHAT IS THAT TO THEE? FOLLOW THOU ME."

It is my earnest wish, and prayer, and hope, that, hereafter, much greater numbers of the Jews may be converted, than have been hitherto. But of this you may be assured, that as soon as they *are* converted they will sink into the general Body of Christ's flock, and be no more peculiarly God's favoured People than (blessed be his Name!) all Christians are so. They will have no advantage over those of their forefathers (a small part indeed of the whole nation, but yet "*great multitudes* both of men and women") who embraced the Gospel when

first preached, and who from time to time have since become Christians. And they will certainly not be converted by any such overpowering sign from Heaven as that of Christ coming in bodily person upon earth, — recalling the "Israelites after the flesh" to Judea, rebuilding Jerusalem, and there reigning in worldly splendour with his saints; and giving a preference and superior rank in his kingdom to those of one particular nation. Whether they will ever again have any *political* distinction as a nation, (just as the English, French, Dutch, &c. are politically distinct nations, with independent governments,) this we cannot, of course, determine; but a *religious* distinction between converted Jews, and Christians of any other *race*, we may be sure there is no ground for expecting.

This is indeed the sort of expectation which the unbelieving Jews now entertain; as their fathers did, at the coming of Jesus Christ; and this it was that caused most of the nation to reject Him. They clung to the idea of the "Son of Man" coming in visible glory in the

clouds of heaven (Daniel vii. 13), to establish a triumphant temporal kingdom: and of this kingdom (be it remembered) they believed, and still believe, all nations shall be *subjects*;—all are to *acknowledge* the true God and his Anointed (or Messiah); but, still, according to them, there is to be an eternal distinction between Jew and Gentile; none are to have an equal share in the divine favour with the genuine descendants of Abraham. And this it was that hardened their hearts against their Lord when He did come. They were at that time expecting the Christ; they were, many of them, ready even to acknowledge Jesus when he wrought miracles among them; and would fain have "taken Him by force to make Him a King" (John vi. 15); but they could not reconcile themselves to "a kingdom not of this world," —without any of the earthly splendour they had set their hearts on: and still less, afterwards, could they bear the admission of the Gentiles to be, in that kingdom, on a level with themselves.

Now if all these things were to come to

pass, the determined expectation of which caused the Jews to reject Christ,—if He should actually appear, with miraculous splendour, as the restorer of the Jewish Nation, and City, and Temple, reigning over the whole world as a great earthly sovereign, and reserving peculiar privileges for his own nation,—if, I say, all these expectations should be fulfilled, to which the Jews have so long and so obstinately clung, surely this would be not so much a conversion of the Jews to Christianity, as *a conversion of Christians to Judaism;* it would not be bringing the Jews to the Gospel, by overcoming their national prejudices, but rather carrying back the Gospel to meet the Jewish prejudices: it would be destroying the spiritual character of our Religion, and establishing those erroneous views which have hitherto caused the Jews to reject it.

We may conclude, then, that all the promises and predictions in Scripture relative to the future glories of the Jews and of Jerusalem, are to be understood of the christian Church, of which the Jewish Church was a figure; and all that

is said of feasting and splendour, and wealth, and worldly greatness and enjoyment, is to be interpreted spiritually of the inward comfort and peace of mind, and "joy of the Holy Ghost" (1 Thessalonians, i. 6), which is promised to sincere Christians in this life, and of the unspeakable happiness prepared for them after death.

Meanwhile it is a great consolation to us to look forward, as I think we are authorized to do, to a time when not only the *knowledge* of the Gospel will be greatly extended, but also, the *influence* of the Gospel on Christians' hearts, and tempers, and lives—"the knowledge and *love* of God," and the "fruits of his Spirit,"—will be still much more increased;—when those who are Christians in name, will be much less disposed to content themselves with the *name*,—much more careful to be Christians in principle and in conduct, than the far greater part of them are now:—when Christians, generally, will not look, as they are apt to do now, on the Apostles and others of the early Church whom it is usual to *distin-*

guish by the title of Saint, as possessing a degree and a kind of christian excellence which it would be vain and presumptuous for ordinary Christians to think of equalling; but will consider and practically remember, that *all* Christians are "called [to be]* Saints," and endued with the Holy Spirit of God; not indeed to inspire them with a new revelation, or to confer any miraculous gifts, (which do not either *prove*, or *make*, the possessor the more acceptable in God's sight,) but to enable them to purify their own hearts and lives. The wicked Balaam was a prophet; and the traitor Judas worked miracles. These extraordinary powers, therefore, are neither any *proof* of superior personal holiness, nor any *substitute* for it in God's sight. Nor is the absence of these miraculous gifts in ourselves, any argument that a less degree of christian virtue will suffice for our salvation, than was required of the Apostles.

Let us hope that the time will come when christian privileges and duties shall

* "To be" is inserted in our version; but the exact rendering of the original is "called Saints."

be generally viewed in this manner, and when such views shall be acted upon. Whether any of us shall live to see the beginning of such a change, is more than we can tell. Nay, we cannot tell whether each of us may not even be enabled, by his own example, and his own exertions in enlightening and improving others, to do something towards bringing about this change. But this we do know most certainly; that each of us is bound, in gratitude for Christ's redeeming mercy;—in prudent care for his own immortal soul,—to labour earnestly for such a change in his *own* life and heart. We are, each of us, bound, at his own peril, to think, and live, and act, in such a manner, as *would*, if all Christians *were to do the same*, bring about, and indeed *constitute*, this Millennium of christian zeal and holiness. And each of us who does this, whether others follow his example or not, "shall in no wise lose his own reward."

LECTURE VIII.

Rewards and Punishments.

I PROCEED to offer a few remarks on the condition of men in the next world, after the final Judgment.

On this point (as well as on all others relating to the state of things after death), the accounts given by the Sacred Writers, though very distinct and positive in declaring the *certainty* of future rewards and punishments, are yet extremely brief, uncircumstantial, and unsatisfactory to curiosity. And there are not wanting probable reasons that may be offered (besides others, perhaps, of which we know nothing) why they have thus abstained from giving any full and detailed account of the life to come.

In the first place, it is a general rule with the inspired Writers,—or rather, I should say, with the Holy Spirit who directed them,—to reveal nothing for the

mere gratification of curiosity;—nothing that is not practically necessary to be known, with a view to its influence on the heart and conduct; but to leave us to find out for ourselves, if we will, whatever our natural powers of reason are capable of discovering, and to remain ignorant of the rest. The doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments, and the principles on which these are to be distributed, is more than Man, by his unassisted powers, is able to discover, (at least with any certainty, or with any correctness,) and is also immensely important for him to be assured of: this knowledge therefore is imparted in a miraculous manner; that is, by immediate divine revelation. But God has *not* thought fit to work a miracle for the gratification of our curiosity, or to communicate by revelation anything that we can discover for ourselves; as, for example, all the useful arts and sciences employed in human life. The mysteries revealed in Scripture, in short, are such as are both *needful* to be known, and what could not be known *without* revelation.

Another reason probably for the scanty information imparted in Scripture respecting the next world is, that most likely there are many things connected with it which we could not possibly comprehend, with our present faculties, any more than a man born blind can understand the nature of colours; so that unless our powers of understanding were enlarged beyond what is fitting for our present state of existence, any attempt to explain to us such mysteries would be likely to mislead or bewilder us.

Such a revelation, indeed, and such an enlargement of faculties to comprehend it, does seem to have been vouchsafed to the Apostle Paul, in the vision which he alludes to in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, as having taken place fourteen years before the time of his writing; in which he was "caught up into Paradise," and heard "unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." The word which is here rendered "lawful" would be more closely translated (as you may see it in the margin of the Bible) "possible;" meaning, I conceive, that

the ideas conveyed to him were such as he could not, by any powers of human language, convey to another. But such revelations are not needed for all.

I think there may also be perceived a third reason for the *brief, dry, general* language of Scripture on these points; which is what I alluded to in a former discourse; namely, that since no impostor *would*, and no enthusiast *could*, have written in such a style on such a subject, but would have been sure to enlarge on all the particulars of a future life, and give the most lively and glowing descriptions of things so interesting to curiosity; it follows, inevitably, that the Apostles who wrote of them in so plain, concise, and unpretending a manner, could not have been either impostors or enthusiasts; that is, must have been men truly inspired, saying just what they were commissioned to say. And it may have been part of the divine design that this evidence should be afforded us.

It being then, as I have said, the design of the christian revelation to convey to us such knowledge as may be of practical

use, we might from this have expected that what it does teach us concerning the rewards and punishments of the next world should be in relation to those only who have heard the Gospel, and who have thence had it in their power to receive or reject,—to obey or disobey it. And it is so accordingly that the New-testament-writers evidently mean to be understood. They do not indeed tell us that those who have lived and died in total ignorance of the Gospel will have no rewards or punishments in the next world: but as promises and threats can be of no avail to one whom they do not reach, it would have been merely a gratification of speculative curiosity if the Sacred Writers had given us information respecting any future rewards and punishments except those that await such persons as have had the Gospel preached to them. We are taught indeed that the promise of eternal life is held out to those who, when they do hear, heartily embrace the Gospel: and this is most needful to be taught us, not only as an encouragement to ourselves, but also because as *no* such promise is held out to

any others, we thence learn how great a benefit we are conferring on those children whom we may instruct in the christian Religion, and on those Heathen whom we may convert to it. So far therefore the information conveyed to us is practical: it is connected with our duty of spreading Christianity. But any further information respecting the future condition of those ignorant of Christianity would not practically concern us, to whom it has been made known.

You will find accordingly on examining all the passages in which the New-testament-writers mention future rewards and punishments, that they tell us of these by way of *encouragement* and of *warning;* and must therefore be understood as speaking in reference to those whom this encouragement and warning can *reach;*—to those, in short, who have heard the Gospel. As for such as may live and die without any opportunity of hearing it, the particulars of *their* future condition, it would be contrary to the general design of Revelation to make known to us; since the question does not practically concern us.

Keeping in mind, then, that what the Scriptures reveal respecting the rewards and punishments of the next world, is to be understood in reference to Christians, or to those who *might* have been Christians, you will find that enough is made known to us to produce a practical influence on our life, though not enough to afford full gratification to our curiosity on many interesting points.

One of the few particulars revealed to us on the subject, is mentioned by our Lord in the passage in which He assures his disciples that He goes to prepare a place for them, in that heavenly dwelling which he calls his "Father's house;" and that in *that* "house there are *many mansions*" (John xiv. 2); that is, that all his faithful disciples will find admittance to the heavenly glories He sets before them: and that no one of them need fear that the admission of another shall exclude himself. This circumstance He points out to their notice on account of the difference, in this respect, between the prize held out to the Christian, and all

the glory and greatness of *this* world. The disciples had more than once been checked by Him for their spirit of *rivalry*, in contending and disputing among themselves which should be the greatest in his kingdom. But though He forbids them to exalt themselves one above another, or at the expense of each other, He seeks not so much to extinguish their ambition after glory and greatness, as to direct it to the proper objects, and to explain to them the peculiar character of those objects. It was not unnatural for them, unskilled as they *then* were in the nature of Christ's kingdom, to conjecture respecting the prizes held out in it, from a view of the great and desirable objects which men pursue in this world; and therefore, of course, to combine with their ideas of its grandeur and elevation, the idea of the *superiority* of one to another. In the present life the greatest objects of ambition, and which men most eagerly strive for, are such as, *by their nature*, can only be attained by a few. The high-spirited and ambitious aim at *distinction* of some kind or other; that is, at being set apart

and distinguished from the generality. That there should be any who are wealthy, powerful, and celebrated, implies a necessity that there should be others, and those the greater part, who are poor,—who are subjects,—who are obscure. That all, or even the greater part, of any community, should be rich men, or rulers, or eminent and famous, is not only impossible, but inconceivable.

In Christ's heavenly kingdom, however, the contrary is to take place: in that, the elevation of the one does not imply the depression of another, as is the case here: there are "many mansions" of glory in his Father's house: even as many as there may be to occupy them; and none will be excluded from this exalted state of happiness, who have duly prepared themselves for it. The power, and splendour, and riches of that better world, not depending on the superiority of some over the rest, may be enjoyed by an unlimited number, and by each in proportion to his fitness for it. The prizes of Christ's kingdom, in short, are not to be won by a few to the exclusion of the rest; but by all, in

proportion as they shall have duly striven for them. "Know ye not," says the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, "that they which run in a race, run *all*, but *one* receiveth the prize? so run, that *ye* may obtain:" that is, if you are diligent in running the race that is set before you, you cannot miss the prize from being outstripped by another; but "*ye*," that is, *all* of you who exert yourselves in the course, shall "obtain an incorruptible crown." In the race for most worldly objects, one who has prepared himself however well, "runs uncertainly;" since after all his exertions another may outstrip him; whereas he who aids a brother in striving for the "incorruptible crown," is even benefiting himself.

It is not however to be understood from these passages, that there will be no inequality in the happiness of the next world; that all the mansions of heavenly bliss are alike: it is only meant that ample provision will be made for rewarding all and each, according to their *absolute*, not their *comparative* deserts; that there will be no rivalry,—no opposition of one to

another,—no exclusion of any one from any degree of exaltation, on account of the *worthiness* of another, but only on account of his own *un*worthiness. But it is highly probable that different degrees of reward, and also of punishment, will be prepared for those who have approached more or less to the model which Christ set before us, or who have departed more or less from it. I do not indeed think it safe, in such a case as this, to be guided by our own conjectures as to what is reasonable; but our Lord says expressly, in one place, that "the servant who knew not his Lord's will, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes;" but he "which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, shall be beaten with many stripes." And in the parables also of the Talents and of the Pounds, which are evidently intended to convey to us some knowledge respecting our final judgment, we find that a higher reward is bestowed on those who had (as in the parable of the Pounds) made a greater improvement than others, of the *same* deposit; and again (as in the parable

of the Talents) on those who had had the larger share entrusted to them, when they were found to have made a proportionably good use of it; and it is probable He meant us to understand that their punishment would have been proportionably great also, had they misapplied the greater deposit, or let it lie idle.

This consideration may afford both encouragement to the zealous Christian, and alarm the negligent. The one is urged by this thought, to aim at continually-increasing perfection, knowing that no improvement will ever be unnoticed, or forgotten, or unrewarded by God—that every growth in grace,—every effort after increased holiness, will be as a seed sown in good ground, which brings forth a hundred-fold at the day of harvest; and the other—the careless or the disobedient Christian, may, by the same thought, be alarmed, and warned not to shelter himself, as men are so apt to do, under the vain protection of another's faults; flattering himself that he shall surely be saved, because he is not so bad as many of his neighbours, and much better than some

of the worst. *They* may perhaps suffer a heavier judgment; but *his* will not on that account be the lighter. As the rewards, so also, no doubt, the punishments of the next world, will be distributed according to each man's *own* behaviour, not from comparison with his neighbour's. The wicked will be punished, not for being worse than others, but for being worse than they ought to have been, according to their opportunities. And the unprofitable servant, we find, who had received but *one* talent, and had buried it in the earth, is cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth; although we cannot but suppose the guilt and the punishment, would have been greater, of one who should have so neglected *five* talents, or who should have *misapplied* or *squandered* away what was entrusted to him.

Let no one, therefore, who is persuaded that he shall not fail of a place in the mansions of bliss, imagine that any further exertions after increased virtue,—after a still nearer approach to his heavenly Master,—are needless, or will do

nothing towards improving his eternal condition. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Insatiable is the covetousness of heavenly grace and virtue,—boundless the ambition of divine favour,—in the hearty and sincere Christian; and he who is contented to stand still where he is, from thinking that he has done enough to ensure his salvation, gives reason (by the very circumstance of his entertaining that thought) to fear, that he has done very far too little,—that his confidence is ill-founded,—and that, instead of standing still, he will fall back. The Apostle Paul, whom none of us is likely to excel, tells us, of himself, "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And let him who is conscious of *not* being such as he ought to be, but consoles himself that there are many others worse, consider that it will be small consolation to him hereafter, if he is himself miserable, to know that

those others are still more miserable. We may be sure there will be no want of mansions, or of suitable variety of mansions, either in the place of reward, or of punishment.

In speaking of the rewards and punishments of the next world, I have always studiously confined myself as closely as possible to that which has been revealed to us in Scripture. For there is no subject in which it is less safe to trust to such conjectures as our own reason may lead to; being one which is the more mysteriously difficult, the more it is considered. Some, who have not observed this rule, have ventured, first, to conjecture, and afterwards, confidently to teach, that the condemnation of the wicked in the next world will not be final; which, they contend, is inconsistent with the goodness of God; and that all will at length be brought to immortal happiness. Now, whether this their doctrine be true or not, I scruple not to say, that it is highly presumptuous in any one to assert it; since it is wholly unwarranted by Scrip-

ture; and, therefore, even if their opinion be right, they cannot possibly *know* it to be right. The expressions used in speaking of the rewards of the faithful, and of the punishments of the disobedient, are the very same; both are described in the like terms, denoting that they shall have no end; as, for example, Matthew xxv. "These shall go away into *everlasting punishment*, and the righteous into life *everlasting*." Have we any warrant in Scripture for saying that the same word* is to be interpreted literally in one part of the sentence, and in the other, figuratively? And again we are told, in another passage, of the place "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."† And again, that "the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." Now supposing

* In our translation it is "everlasting" in the first part of the sentence, and "eternal" (of which the meaning is the same) in the other; but in the original Greek, the same word is used in both places. But some understand by the word, in both places, "lasting during the whole of *existence*;"—"not coming to an end while the Being continues to live." And this while it would imply, to the blest, eternity, would not be inconsistent with the final *destruction* of the ungodly. See the latter part of this Lecture.

† Isaiah lxvi. 24, and Mark ix. 44.

that this and the other passages relating to future punishment may be understood, and rightly understood, as meaning only a long time, and yet that the very same words, when applied to the happiness of the blest, are to be interpreted to signify "for ever and ever"—supposing, I say, this to be the true state of the case, what ground have we *in Scripture* for these different interpretations?

The fact is, that the notion I have been speaking of is *not* derived from the Word of God, but from the conjectures of men, respecting the supposed nature of the Almighty; of which we can know little or nothing, except what Scripture reveals. And if such conjectures are to be indulged at all, there is no saying to what they will at length lead us. If we are to measure the dealings of God by the standard of our own reason, we shall find ourselves at a loss to explain *any* future punishment at all. For it is certain that the object proposed by *human* punishments is, the *prevention of future* crimes, by holding out a terror to transgressors; *we* punish a man, not because he has

offended, but that others may be deterred from offending by his example. Now how any such purpose can be answered by the future punishment of the wicked, whether for a time, or for ever, we can not at all conceive. And yet if there be any truth in God's word, we are sure that the wicked will *not* go unpunished.

The truth is, we had better abstain from conjectures on a subject manifestly beyond the reach of our present faculties. The existence of any evil at all in the Creation, is a mystery we cannot explain. It is a difficulty which may perhaps be cleared up to us in a future state; but the Scriptures give us no revelation concerning it. And those who set at defiance the plain and obvious sense of Scripture, by contending (as some do) for the final admission to eternal happiness of all men, in order (as they themselves profess) to get over the difficulty by this means, and to reconcile the existence of evil with the benevolence of God, do not in fact, after all, when they have put the most forced interpretation on the words of the sacred Writers, advance one single step towards

their point. For the main difficulty is not the *amount* of the evil that exists, but the existence of *any at all*. Any, even the smallest portion of evil, is quite unaccountable, supposing that the same amount of good could be attained *without* that evil; and why it is not so attainable, is more than we are able to explain. And if there be some reason we cannot understand, why a small amount of evil is unavoidable, there may be, for aught we know, the same reason for a greater amount. I will undertake to explain to any one the final condemnation of the wicked, if he will explain to me the *existence* of the wicked;—if he will explain why God does not cause all those to die in the cradle, of whom He foresees that when they grow up they will lead a sinful life. The thing *cannot* be explained: and it is better to rest satisfied with knowing as much as God has thought fit to teach us, than to try our strength against mysteries which will but deride our weakness. All we can say is, that, for some *unknown cause*, evil is unavoidable. Now it is a manifest absurdity to attempt to explain

and limit the operations of an unknown cause.*

It would indeed be very consolatory to be able to make out, *on sufficient grounds*, that the total amount of suffering, past, present, and future, in the Universe, is far less than we had imagined. But even if we could satisfy ourselves of this,—if we could discover that not a hundredth part of the evil that we believe to exist, really does exist,—still, as I have said, this diminution of the *evil* itself, would not at all diminish the *difficulty*—I may say the impossibility—of explaining how it comes to pass that in the work of a benevolent Creator there should be *any* evil at all.

Unthinking people, however, are apt to fancy that a difficulty is itself diminished, if the *thing* is diminished, *about which* the difficulty arises. For instance, it is admitted, as is well known, to be impossible for man to annihilate any portion of material substance: we can destroy its form, —as by tearing this book into shreds;—

* See Essays by Rev. H. T. Woodward, (Duncan, Paternoster Row,) Essay 15.

or we can divide it into particles invisible to our eyes, as by burning it, so as to disperse part into vapour and smoke, and scatter away the ashes that remain; but we cannot annihilate, that is, cause to exist no longer, the material substance. And as impossibility does not admit of different degrees, it is equally impossible to annihilate the smallest, and the largest, quantity of matter. And yet perhaps some people if they were told that some chemist had succeeded in annihilating a few grains of sand, though they might not absolutely believe the report, yet would not be so much startled at the extravagance of it, as if it had been said that he had annihilated some huge mountain. Again, it is thought by most to be impossible (at least they would have great difficulty in admitting it) to convert, as some ancient chemists attempted to do, the baser metals into gold: and I suppose most persons, if they were told of some one's having changed several tons of lead into gold, would at once reject the account as an idle tale: but if they were told that it was *only a few grains*, some,

I imagine, would feel less confidence in the falsity of the report; and yet, if the difficulty is, to conceive how lead can become gold, that difficulty is not at all lessened by lessening the quantity of the metal.

In like manner, since we cannot conceive it possible by human power to increase five loaves so as to feed five thousand men, we regard that miracle of our Lord's as a plain proof of his divine power: now would it be at all a less miracle to make five loaves to become six? The amount of the *bread* produced is indeed much less; but the amount of the *difficulty* (which in this case is an impossibility) is the very same, to conceive any human power performing either the one act or the other. And yet many persons, I believe, would be inclined to look on the one as a *greater miracle* than the other.

And so it is with some unthinking persons, in respect of the present subject. If they can devise some theory which will explain away great part of the supposed amount of evil in the Universe,

they hastily conclude that they have explained away, some part at least, of the difficulty presented by the existence of evil. Our distress and alarm, indeed, would be diminished by a diminution of the evil that exists; but the *difficulty* would remain precisely the same. And of this, as I have said, no explanation can be framed by human reason, or is to be found in Scripture. God's revelations are intended for our practical use; and it is our part to apply them to that use. We know that evil does exist; and we are taught how to *escape* it eternally; let us first study to make the right use of *this* knowledge; and hereafter, doubtless, we shall know more. Of the goodness of God we know thus much: that He has called us, out of nothing, into life, and has opened a way to us, through the mysterious sacrifice of Christ, to eternal happiness: of this goodness it is our part to avail ourselves; but not to speculate and presume on any notions of divine goodness which may chance to enter our minds.

We know that in this present world

there *is* evil as well as good: whether in the next world there will be an end put to all evil, is a question on which Scripture, if we look to that alone, gives us only this slight hint; that we are told (by Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 25), that Christ "must reign till He hath put all things under his feet;" and that "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." And this certainly does not seem consistent with the continuance for ever of a number of wicked Beings, alive, and hating Christ, and odious in his sight. But thus much we know assuredly from Scripture; that at the end of the world Christ's faithful servants, and the disobedient, will be not intermingled, as now, but separated; and that good and evil, unmixed,—not irregularly distributed as they are here,—will be allotted them respectively. In this world the wheat and the tares are growing together: and in the present life, the best men suffer afflictions; the holiest are not exempt from "the crafts and assaults" of evil Spirits. In this respect their condition resembles that of their great Master, who, in his life of humilia-

tion, was Himself tempted by the Devil, and suffered a variety of hardships and afflictions, and was scourged and nailed to the cross. Hereafter, at the end of the world, He shall "come again in his glorious majesty," and "all things shall be put under his feet;" and then shall those who have faithfully endured the temptations and trials they have been exposed to, be delivered, for the future, from all troubles, and "enter into the joy of their Lord;" being admitted into the company of angels, and "just men made perfect." Pain and pleasure—vice and virtue,—good men and bad men, will then no longer be *intermixed* and associated together, as they are in this world: but whether evil and pain will ever cease to exist, or not, we shall then perhaps be able to know with certainty, when we have learnt why they exist at all; which no one will ever be able to explain while this world lasts.*

* "And what, if much be still unknown?
Thy Lord shall teach thee that,
When thou shalt stand before His throne,
Or sit as Mary sat.

The blest in a future life will no doubt have their powers of thought enlarged, so as to be able to understand, even *without* an express revelation, many things that "pass man's understanding" in this life, and perhaps much that could not even be *revealed* to us with our present faculties. And though they must still remain at an immeasurable distance from the great Creator, and will doubtless be still more lost in admiration of his stupendous works than now (just as an unbounded prospect seems, as we view it from higher and higher spots, to grow more and more vast; the horizon widening around us in proportion to our elevation)—unable, I say, as they will still be, to fathom the depths of the divine counsels, we cannot but suppose all *uneasy* doubts and diffi-

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"Wait till He shall, Himself, disclose
Things now beyond thy reach;
But listen not, my child, to those
Who the Lord's secrets teach;

"Who teach thee more than He has taught,
Tell more than He reveal'd,
Preach tidings which He never brought,
And read what He left seal'd."

Bp. Hinds's Poems.

culties will be removed; and that to be free (not indeed from all ignorance, but) from all *painful perplexity*, will be a part of their happiness.

It seems to me that the Scriptures afford us some reason for suspecting that Angels, good and evil, have formerly been subjected to some such trial as ours is now; and it is possible that they are now, respectively, what we shall be hereafter; the one part, now safe from falling, and eternally blessed, the other, hopelessly lost. This at least is certain, that we are exhorted by the Apostle Jude (v. 6) to take warning from the example of "the Angels who kept not their first estate;" and we are told of the wicked being joined with them in the "everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels;" and on the other hand we are told of good men in heaven becoming "equal to the Angels," or, "as the Angels in heaven" (Luke xx. 36; Mark xii. 25); of whose blessed society, and of whose happiness, they will, we may suppose, be partakers.*

* See Lectures on the "Scripture-revelations respecting good and evil Angels."

On the whole then, the Scriptures do not, I think, afford us any ground for expecting that those who shall be condemned at the last day as having wilfully rejected or rebelled against their Lord, will be finally delivered;—that their doom, and that of the evil Angels, will ever be reversed.

What that doom will be, whether the terms in which it is commonly spoken of in Scripture,—"death," "destruction," "perishing," &c.* are to be understood figuratively, as denoting immortal life in a state of misery, or more literally, as denoting a final extinction of existence,—this is quite a different question. It is certain that the words, "life," "eternal life," "immortality," &c.† are always applied to the condition of those, and of those only, who shall at the last day be approved as "good and faithful servants," who are to "enter into the joy of their Lord."

"Life" as applied to their condition, is usually understood to mean "happy life."

* See Matt. x. 28; Rom. vi. 21—23, &c.

† See John xx. 31; v. 29; xi. 25; 1 Peter iii. 7; 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16, &c.

And that theirs will *be* a happy life, we are indeed plainly taught; but I do not think we are anywhere taught that the word "life" does of itself necessarily imply happiness. If so indeed, it would be a mere tautology to speak of a "happy life;" and a contradiction, to speak of a "miserable life;" which we know is not the case, according to the usage of any language. In all Ages and Countries "life," and the words answering to it in other languages, have always been applied, in ordinary discourse, to a wretched life, no less properly than to a happy one. Life, therefore, in the received sense of the word, would apply equally to the condition of the blest and of the condemned, supposing these last to be destined to continue for ever living in a state of misery. And yet, to *their* condition the words "life" and "immortality" never are applied in Scripture. If therefore we suppose the hearers of Jesus and his Apostles to have understood, as nearly as possible in the ordinary sense, the words employed, they must naturally have conceived them to mean (if they were taught nothing to the

contrary) that the condemned were really and literally to be "destroyed," and cease to exist; not, that they were to exist for ever in a state of wretchedness. For they are never spoken of as being kept alive, but as *forfeiting* life: as for instance, "Ye will not come unto me that ye may *have life*:"—"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath *not* life." And again, "perdition," "death," "destruction," are employed in numerous passages to express the doom of the condemned. All which expressions would, as I have said, be naturally taken in their usual and obvious sense, if nothing were taught to the contrary.*

That these expressions however are to be understood not in their ordinary sense, but figuratively, to signify an immortality of suffering, is inferred, by a large proportion of Christians, from some other passages: as, where our Lord speaks of "everlasting punishment," "everlasting fire," and of being "cast into Hell, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched."

* See the preceding part of this Lecture, p. 236.

This last expression of his is taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah (lxvi. 24), who speaks of "the carcases of the men that have transgressed, whose worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh:" describing evidently the kind of doom inflicted by the eastern nations on the vilest offenders, who were not only slain, but their bodies deprived of the rites of burial, and either burned to ashes (which among them, was regarded as a great indignity,) or left to moulder above ground and be devoured by worms.

From such passages as these it has been inferred that the sufferings, and consequently, the life, of the condemned, is never to have an end. And the expressions will certainly bear that sense; which would perhaps be their most obvious and natural meaning, if these expressions were the only ones on the subject that are to be found in Scripture. But they will also bear another sense; which, if not more probable in itself, is certainly more reconcileable with the ordinary meaning of the words "destruction," &c. which so often

occur. The expressions of "eternal punishment," "unquenchable fire," &c. may mean merely that there is to be *no deliverance*,—no revival,—no restoration,—of the condemned. "Death," simply, does not shut out the hope of being brought to life again: "eternal death," does. "Fire" may be *quenched* before it has entirely consumed what it is burning: "unquenchable fire" would seem most naturally to mean that which destroys it utterly.

It may be said indeed, that supposing Man's soul to be an immaterial Being, it cannot be consumed and *destroyed* by literal *material* fire or worms. That is true: but no more can it *suffer* from these. We all know that no fire, literally so called, can give us any pain unless it reach our bodies. The "fire," therefore, and the "worm" that are spoken of, must at any rate, it would seem, be something figuratively so called;—something that is to the soul, what worms and fire are to a body. And as the effect of worms or fire is, not, to *preserve* the body they prey upon, but to consume, destroy, and put

an end to it, it would follow, if the correspondence hold good, that the fire, figuratively so called, which is prepared for the condemned, is something that is really to destroy and put an end to them; and is called "everlasting" or "unquenchable" fire, to denote that they are not to be saved from it, but that their destruction is to be *final.* So in the parable of the tares, our Lord describes himself as saying, "gather ye first the tares, and bind them in bundles to *burn them;* but gather the wheat *into my garner;*" as if to denote that the one is to be (as we know is the practice of the husbandman) carefully preserved, and the other, completely put an end to.

We must not indeed (as I have already said) venture to conclude at once, from our conviction of the divine goodness and power,* that evil will ever cease

*"If Man could have been saved without it, would the Lord of Glory have been led as a sheep to the slaughter? If *it had been possible* (as he himself expresses it) for that cup to pass from him, would his Father have given it to him to drink? No. The death of the cross supersedes the necessity of every other proof, that there is no such thing as unlimited and absolute omnipotence."—*Woodward's Essays*, 3rd edit. pp. 180, 181.

to exist; since we know not how to explain the existence of any evil at all. We can only say there is some *unknown cause* for it; and that it is a foolish presumption to think of assigning a limit to the effects of an unknown cause, except where revelation guides us. But when we are told that Christ is to "reign till He shall have put all things under his feet," and that "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is *death;*" this does afford (as I have already observed) some ground for expecting the ultimate extinction of evil and of suffering, by the total destruction of such as are incapable of good and of happiness.* If "eternal death," means *final* death,—death without any revival,—we can understand what is meant by "Death being the last enemy *destroyed*," viz.: that none henceforth are to be subjected to it. But if "Death" be understood to mean everlasting life in misery, then, it would appear that Death is never to be destroyed at all; since although no one should be henceforth *sentenced* to it,

* See Note at the end of this Lecture.

it would still be going on as a continual *infliction*, for ever.

On the whole therefore I think we are not warranted in concluding (as some have done) so positively concerning this question as to make it a point of christian faith to interpret figuratively and not literally the "death" and "destruction" spoken of in Scripture as the doom of the condemned; and to insist on the belief that they are to be kept alive for ever.

There are persons, I believe, who do not like to hear this question spoken of as one that is left undecided by Scripture. Some would wish that the final extinction of the condemned should be positively declared, because they *wish* to believe that doctrine *true;* and some again, from thinking it a *dangerous* doctrine, wish to have the opposite one positively declared. But all such wishes are quite foreign from the subject. In judging of the sense of Scripture, we should be careful to guard against the error of suffering our wishes to bias the mind. If indeed we had to devise a religion for ourselves, we might indulge our wishes as to what is desir-

able, or our conjectures, as to what seems to us in itself probable, or our judgment, as to what may seem advisable. But when we have before us "Scripture-revelations" on any subject, it is for us to endeavour to make out what it is that Scripture teaches, and what it does not teach. We may wonder perhaps why Scripture has taught us so and so, or why it has withheld such and such knowledge, or why it has not more distinctly revealed this or that: but if we presume to interpret Scripture according to our inclinations or judgments, or to speak positively on points which Scripture has left doubtful, because we think it advisable that all such doubts should be removed, it is plain that this is, not to make *Scripture our guide*, but to make *ourselves the guide of Scripture*.

On one point, and that which ought to afford us the fullest satisfaction, we are left in no doubt:—that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also (if of the number of his approved servants) shall appear with Him in glory," which is to last for ever, we have the fullest assurance from Scripture.

On this state of happiness, and the society of those who shall partake of it, I propose to offer to you some remarks, in the succeeding Lectures; in which, as in those you have hitherto heard, you will meet with no such confident assertions as some are apt to throw out; nor be entertained with fanciful theories delivered as Scripture-truths; but you will meet with cautious endeavours to distinguish the certain from the doubtful: and where I cannot *extend* the boundaries of human knowledge, I will endeavour at least to point out where they lie. If I cannot give you such full and interesting accounts of divine mysteries as more daring inquirers pretend to do, I trust I can at least promise not to mislead you; having long bestowed especial attention on that important and much-neglected branch of learning,—the knowledge of Man's ignorance.

Ignorant, however, as the wisest of us must be on these subjects, the most ignorant of us is wise enough for his own purposes, if he will but seek for the knowledge of his duty, and use what

knowledge he has. Short-sighted as we are, we can see by the light of God's word that there are two paths set before us; the ends of which we cannot indeed *distinctly* see; but we know that the one leads to everlasting happiness, and the other to ruin; and that God has offered us our choice between them, and entreated us to take the better, and promised us strength to walk in it, if we will "strive to enter in at the strait gate."

"Behold," says He, "I set before you, this day, good and evil; blessing and cursing; now, therefore, chuse blessing!" May his grace be effectual with each one of you, that you may spend such a life as you will *wish* to have lived when you reach its close, and such as you may rejoice to have lived, ten thousand ages hence, and for ever.

Note.—"It may be urged, as it respects the case of man particularly, that all his trials are sent for his improvement, and his benefit; that all things work together for good to them that love God; that present sorrows will issue in greater joy hereafter; and that our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. This is all most true, and affords the most abundant proof that God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the

children of men. But such statements do not meet the difficulty proposed. It is answered at once, 'What benefits can painful discipline produce, or what degrees of happiness can the path of suffering lead to, which could not be as amply secured, without these pains and sufferings, by an unlimited and absolute omnipotence?'

"The truth is, that the only rational conclusion which we can arrive at in the matter, is, that in the nature of things, no such attribute can exist. And until the cloud, which its supposed existence throws on every procedure of the Divine Providence, is dissipated, we must either not think at all, or think amiss, on that subject in comparison of which all other subjects are unimportant, namely, the character of God.

"I know that many may, at first sight, be startled at the assertion, that the power of God can, in any sense, be limited. In this, as in various instances, they will object to the same truth as a distinct proposition, which they will freely assume, and take for granted in all their reasonings. These very persons will speak of Providence as devising means, and moving by gradual advances to the accomplishment of an end. If asked, 'Why not decree the end, without the means?' they will answer, 'Because it could not be attained, at least so well, without them.' If, then, the term *could not* be at all admitted (and how freely is this term applied to God in Scripture!) no such thing as unrestricted omnipotence exists.

"'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from all your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?' The second is Isaiah, v. 3, 4. 'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth

grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?' The last which I shall quote is Matt. xxiii. 37, 38. 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.'

"Is this, then, I would ask any fair and candid person, a language which looks as if the All-Gracious Being who employs it, had any relief, or remedy in reserve, for those who wilfully reject the mercies he has freely offered them? Are these like the expressions of one who could bestow salvation, in any other way, or on any other terms?

"From all that has been said, one practical and awful conclusion follows. It has been, in some degree, anticipated; but its deep importance may call for a more explicit statement. It is a truth at which both the ears of the impenitent sinner might tingle; for it cuts off the last remaining hope of those who will not in time fly to the refuge set before them in the Gospel.

"Many, I am persuaded, who do not dare to give utterance or even definite shape, to the imagination, nevertheless deceive their own hearts by the vague and fallacious hope that God, when it comes to the last, will be better than his word. There is, I say, a latent notion in such minds, that as all things are at his disposal, and as upon his mere will it depends, whether the destiny of the soul shall be endless happiness or endless woe, that God, to whom no obstacles or impediments can occur, will, in the plenitude of his omnipotence and sovereignty, decide for mercy. But what if the salvation of the finally impenitent be *impossible!*"—*Woodward's Essays.* See above, p. 253, note.

LECTURE IX.

Condition of the Blest, and their Abode in Heaven.

I PROCEED to offer in this, and in another Lecture, some remarks on the state, as far as it can be known, in which Christ's faithful servants are to exist to all eternity.

"We, according to his promise" (says the Apostle Peter, second Epistle, ch. iii. ver. 13), "look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The whole passage in which these words occur, is one which illustrates very strongly an observation which I have made more than once (in the course of our present inquiry) respecting the brief, dry, unpretending, uncircumstantial manner, in which a future state is everywhere spoken of by the sacred Writers;—a manner eminently unfitted to excite the passions, to amuse the imagination, or to gratify curiosity;—a manner the very

opposite of what an enthusiast would have fallen into, or an impostor would have studied to assume. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat: the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up." Here we might have looked, if any where, for a detailed description of the several circumstances attending this great catastrophe,—for impassioned exclamations concerning it, and magnificent pictures of the scenes that will occur. No such thing: the Apostle immediately proceeds to a practical application of the knowledge he has imparted, to the lives of his hearers: "When, then, all these things are being dissolved, what sort of persons ought ye to be found in holy manner of life and piety?"* ver. 10, 11.

He proceeds next to console them with the assurance that though this great destruction is an event to be *prepared* for, there will be nothing *to regret;* God

* This is the exact translation of the original.

having provided, for such as shall be approved by Him at the day of Judgment, a far better habitation than the Earth (which will then be dissolved), and more suitable to the perfect and happy state they will then be in: "nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Here, again, is an opportunity which would never have been passed over by an enthusiastic visionary or by a forger of "cunningly-devised fables," for entertaining inquisitive minds with a copious and luxuriant description of heavenly joys—for expatiating fully on all the particulars relative to the "new heavens and new earth," he had just mentioned; instead of which, Peter, like an Apostle of the truth,—and like nothing else,—stops short at the positive but brief statement of the fact; and repeats his admonition to turn the knowledge of that fact to good account in practice: "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found by Him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

Of course, the conjectures which unin-

spired men can safely and allowably frame on such a subject must be few and imperfect; but such as they are, they may not be either unintelligible or unprofitable, provided we are careful not to extend our inquiries to matters out of the reach of our present faculties.

The eternal habitation of the blest is described by the Apostle as "new heavens and a new earth:" meaning by "heavens" the air we breathe and sky over our heads, as he means by "earth" the place on which we dwell. And this description must be understood, in a great degree at least, literally; since the blest in the next world, having real material bodies as now, though different from their present bodies, must inhabit some *place* fitted for the reception of such bodies; though exempt, of course, from the evils of the world they now dwell in, and from all temptations that could lead them into sin; "righteousness," says the Apostle, will dwell in the new heavens and the "new earth" which God has promised.

Whether the *place* of the habitation of

the blest will be this present Earth, renewed and restored to such a condition as that in which it is supposed to have been created, when the first man was placed in Paradise, or altered in some other way; or whether they will be fixed in some other part of the universe, we have no means of ascertaining, nor is it of any consequence that we should know.

It is worth observing, however, that it is common with a large proportion of Christians (and the mistake seems in itself a harmless one) to confound together in a great degree, in their thoughts and language, "heaven" when employed to signify the place of happiness, and the abode of the holy angels, with "heaven" in the other sense,—the visible heavens,—otherwise called the sky;—all, in short, that is removed from this earth, and appears *above* those who inhabit it; such as the clouds, the sun, moon, and stars, and the like: so that when they speak or think of going to "*heaven*" as to a place of happiness, they, in some degree, connect this in their minds with the idea of some

nearer approach to those heavenly bodies, as they are called, which appear over our heads. This may be considered, in itself, a harmless mistake; but it is, I think, worth noticing on account of the evil that may result from it. If a person who has such a notion as this impressed on his mind as a *part of his religious belief*, chance to meet with some half-learned scoffer, who has acquired a slight smattering of astronomy, and who informs him (of what is the truth) that the stars which we see, are, many of them, more distant from each other, and from the sun, than they are from us,—that the sun and moon, and other heavenly bodies, are many millions of miles apart,—he will find that his former notions of heaven are quite incorrect; and yet will perhaps fail to perceive that those notions are not at all connected with the truths of his religion.

"A little learning," it has been remarked, and with truth, is often "a dangerous thing:" I do not, however, think ignorance at all *more* safe: the danger of a *little* learning consists in

men's not being sensible that it *is* but a little. The most learned man knows but little, compared to what he is ignorant of; and if he is not aware of his ignorance, his knowledge will only mislead him.

Let it be recollected, then, and carefully kept in mind, that God is in all places alike, and at once. He is *here* this moment, and at all times, as well as in the most remote regions of the universe. "Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit, or whither shall I go then from thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down to hell [*i. e.* the grave], Thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." Indeed, we have no reason to suppose that that great Spirit whom we call God, and whom we suppose not to partake at all of the nature of any material substance, has any relation to *place* at all, or can be properly said to be *in* any place. Strictly speaking, it is not that God is every where *present*, but

rather, that all things are *present to Him;* as falling under his perfect knowledge and complete control.

When, therefore, we speak of the blest as being admitted into the *presence* of God, we must remember, that this has not necessarily anything to do with change of *place*, but implies rather a change in their *condition*.

All Beings are constantly and equally in the presence, literally, of the God to whom the whole universe is present; but all are not equally *conscious* of this. The brute animals do really, as well as ourselves, "in Him, live and move, and have their being," and could not exist a moment without the care of his providence; but they cannot know of his existence. Man can, and does; and is invited to address himself to this great and inconceivable Being by prayer. Some few men, as the Apostles and Prophets, have been conscious of receiving direct and distinct communications from Him; which enabled them (in order that they might be assured they were not misled by fancy) to foretell future events, and perform

other things surpassing human power. And we find Him, before the expulsion of our first Parents from Paradise, represented as holding immediate converse with them. The like, in probably a much higher degree than all these, we may expect will take place in the case of his faithful servants hereafter. His presence, to which they hope to be admitted, must mean the more distinct *perception* of his presence, and more distinct *communication* with him. The all-present God does not inhabit one place more than another; but He will be more *manifest* to his servants, in their glorified state, than now; and this, probably, through the means of a change in their powers and faculties. A blind man may be close to some goodly prospect; but since he sees nothing of it, it is the same thing to him whether he is present or absent. An infant, again, or a brute beast, or an idiot, may be *in the midst* of a number of wise and worthy men; but cannot, properly speaking, be said to be *in their company*, because it wants the faculties to discern what they are, and to join

their society. Let the blind man's eyes be opened, and the prospect will at once become really present to him; that is, present to his *mind:* let the infant grow up to be a man,—let the brute or the idiot be supposed to be suddenly endowed with reason,—and let them be placed in the midst of the very same persons, and they will then be, truly, in their company, from being capable of understanding them and holding converse with them. Even thus, if the eyes of our minds be opened,—if the faculties be enlarged, and the powers of reason advanced, as those of an infant when he grows up,—we shall at once, by the change wrought within us, be brought nearer to, what may be called, the presence of God; that is, to the capacity of perceiving more of his glorious perfections, than we can in our present state, and of holding some such intercourse with Him as, now, we cannot.

Although, however, the All-present Spirit, which we call God, has no relation to place, nor can be said to be in one part of the universe more than in

another, it must be otherwise with the bodily person of the Lord Jesus, with whom the Divine Spirit was mysteriously united. A *body* must be in some place, and cannot be in more than one at once. And the same must be the case with the bodily persons of Enoch and Elijah; and if there be any other highly-favoured personages, to whom it has been given to forestall the general resurrection. I allude to those saints, whose bodies, we are told, arose and "came into the holy city after the resurrection" of our Lord, and "were seen by many." Jesus Christ and Elijah were visibly removed from the earth; of Enoch's translation we have no particular account. In what place, however, these dwell, and whether it be the same that is appointed for the future habitation of all the faithful, we have no means of knowing. That Jesus Christ will Himself come in bodily person to judge the earth at the last day, there is no room to doubt; and we also learn from the Apostle Paul, that He will remove from the earth his faithful servants: "We which are alive, and remain, shall be

caught up together with them" (that is, those raised from the dead) "in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we be ever *with* the Lord." Indeed if Peter's account of the fire, which is to consume the earth, and all things in it, be taken literally (which there is no reason to doubt), *that* would lead us to suppose that the approved servants of Christ must first be removed from it; but whether this earth will afterwards (as some have conjectured) be restored and renewed, and fitted for their habitation, or whether some other place will be set apart for them, is, as I have said, a question, which neither Scripture nor reason will enable us to decide.

And with respect to the kind of life also which they are to lead, the information furnished by Scripture is, as might be expected, very scanty. We are told rather what it will *not* be, than what it *will* be. "In the resurrection," said our Lord to the Sadducees, "they neither marry nor are given in marriage; for*

* I have supplied the word "for," agreeably to the original, Luke xx. 36.

neither can they die any more:"—that is, while in this world the human race is continued, by the birth of one generation, to succeed another that dies; in the next world, on the contrary, there is neither death, nor birth; but all are immortal. This served to confute the absurd objection brought forward by the Sadducees, and to correct the gross notions entertained by some, respecting a future state; but does not satisfy curiosity as to what that state is.

I cannot think, however, that there is any necessity for entertaining such notions of the life to come (and, indeed, of several other points connected with our religion), as are to be met with in some writers. I mean, those who give a more cold, uninviting, uninteresting view than is at all warranted by Scripture, of a sincere Christian's life in this world, and promised reward in the next; from their overlooking, or not dwelling on, one remarkable feature of the Christian Revelation. This feature is, the continual reference made by the inspired writers to *persons*, rather than to mere *things*, or to

characters in the abstract. Christ Himself, that great Person, who is "the Author and Finisher of our faith,"—his life and death for us,—his example set before us,—his presence promised to us in a glorified state hereafter,—these are topics which we find continually dwelt on in the sacred books.

Compare with the language of these books, that of such writers as declaim on the beauty of virtue, in the abstract—on the importance of living in conformity to the dictates of conscience,—on the agreement between our true interest and our duty, &c., and again, in the same kind of style, of the immense value of eternal happiness,—of the delight of being set free from human infirmities and sufferings,—of escaping the misery of hopeless and eternal remorse,—and of being raised to a new and exalted state of being. All this is indeed perfectly true, and of incalculable importance; but such topics, when these alone are dwelt on, are certainly much less interesting,—less calculated to touch the feelings, than that perpetual reference to *persons* which I

have mentioned as so characteristic of the Scriptures.

The Apostles tell us of "putting on Christ,"—of "walking in his steps," who "hath left us an ensample,"—of "being buried with Christ in baptism," and being "risen with Him" to a new and christian life;—of practising this or that duty, because "this is well-pleasing unto the Lord (Jesus Christ);" and such, in short, is the general tone of their exhortations to Christian virtue; which they speak of not as an *abstract thing*, but as set forth, portrayed, and as it were personified, —in our Saviour's human and divine nature.

And again, in speaking of the hopes beyond the grave, which are held out in the Gospel, the sacred writers dwell not so much on the abstract *thing*,—Happiness,—as on an intimate union with our Divine Master, and enjoyment of his presence, in a more perfect manner than we can do in our present state. They speak of "departing and being *with* the Lord;" of "our vile bodies being made *like* unto *his* glorious body:"—"if we

suffer, we shall also *reign with Him ;*" and "so shall we be ever *with the Lord.*" "We know not," says the beloved disciple John, "what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as he is." And it seems to have been from the tone of Christ's own discourses that his Apostles borrowed theirs. He does not dwell on the intrinsic excellence of virtue, and on the value of happiness in the abstract; but his language is, "If a man *love* me, he will keep my saying; and my Father will love him; and *we will come unto* him, and make our abode with him:" "*I* will raise him up the last day:" "that *where I am* ye may be also." —"I will not leave you comfortless; I *will come* unto you," &c.

Such a style of exhortation and of promise is the best fitted both to touch and to improve the human heart: it is suited both to what man's nature actually is, and to what it ought to become. From our natural tendency to emulation, a good example excites the feelings more strongly, —impresses the heart more deeply,—con-

veys instruction more effectually, than the best general descriptions and rules. And again, a mere general account of the sort of life we are hereafter to live, would never make near so strong an impression on our mind, as the thought of what sort of *persons* we are to live with,—what kind of society it is for which we are to qualify ourselves.* Nothing, therefore, could be so interesting, so inviting, and so cheering to a sincere Christian, as the promise held out of a future enjoyment of such happiness as is to consist in the more intimate knowledge of his Redeemer, and a more complete union with Him in a better world.

And the same view serves also, better than any other, to admonish and improve the more imperfect Christian, and to warn and alarm the thoughtless. This world, we know, is not only a state of *trial*, but also a state of *preparation* for another; and to be told *whom* we are to prepare to meet in that other world (if we would hope for admission there), in *whose* company we are to fit ourselves to dwell for

* See "Lectures on Angels," L. i.

ever,—this, together with the example of that Person set before us for our imitation, is much more likely to forward us in the great work of making that preparation, than any number of general rules and general descriptions. Such accordingly, is the effect which (according to the Apostle John, in the passage quoted just above) *arises, naturally,* from the fixing of our thoughts on the Gospel promises: "We know that when He shall appear, we shall be *like* unto Him; for we shall *see Him* as he is: and every one that hath *this hope* in Him, *purifieth* himself, even as He is pure."

And one reason, no doubt, why the Gospels are written in such a form as they are, was to foster such feelings as I have been speaking of, in the heart of the Christian reader. They do not give us merely the substance of the doctrines revealed, and of the great events which took place; but they give us a lively portrait of the "Man, Christ Jesus:" they are not merely *historical,* but, strictly, *biographical.* Brief as they are, they are fitted so to introduce us personally to

Him who called his disciples his "friends," as to make us feel the more lively interest in the thought of meeting Him hereafter; so as to know Him indeed far more intimately, but still to recognise in Him, one with whom we had some degree of personal acquaintance, and whose character, as portrayed by the Evangelists, we had long been used to contemplate, to love, and to imitate.*

Some further particulars relative to the life which will be led by Christ's followers, in the "new earth" prepared for them, I shall reserve for further consideration; and shall then point out some other circumstances in which the future condition of the blessed has been rendered, through the injudicious views that have been taken of it, a less interesting and less agreeable object of contemplation than it ought to be. At present I will conclude by entreating you to lay to heart, especially at this season,† the remark just made

* See "Lectures on the Apostles:" Lect. on the Apostle John.

† This Lecture was delivered at the beginning of a new year.

respecting the preparation for admission into the presence of Christ, which it is our business to make here on earth. Great, no doubt, must the change be which the best Christian must undergo, before he can be qualified for the society of heaven; but the change must be begun, and be carried on, as far as possible, here, or it never will be completed there. Hereafter, says the Apostle John, we shall be like unto our great Master, "when He shall appear, and when we shall see Him as He is;" but, "every one," he adds, "who hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself even as He is pure." Every one who is really full of this expectation, and practically acts upon it, aims continually, by the imitation of Him, to qualify himself, as far as can be done in this world, for seeing his great Master revealed to him, and for being "ever with the Lord."

And every year, every day, and hour, brings us nearer to Christ, or carries us farther from him. The stream of human passions and worldly cares is ever flowing against our exertions, so as to make it

next to impossible to stand still. He who is not advancing, is in reality going back. What then has the year just past done for each one of you in this respect? It has brought you so much nearer to death; has it brought you so much nearer to heaven? Has it advanced you in your christian course? And what will this present year have done for those of you who shall be permitted to see the end of it? It will have been one of the talents entrusted to you: shall it be buried in the earth? Or abused and squandered? Or put out to interest?

These last questions it now depends on each of you how he shall answer. Resolve therefore at this moment (and pray for God's grace to keep your resolution), to endeavour that each succeeding day and year may find you a better Christian than the last,—more advanced towards preparation for that state in which you hope to dwell "for ever with the Lord,"—more fitted for entering on the beginning of that *Great New Year* which shall never have an end.

LECTURE X.

Occupations and State of Society of the Blest.

BEFORE I dismiss the present branch of my subject, I shall lay before you a few further observations on the kind of life to be expected by Christ's faithful followers in the next world, which was touched upon in my last Lecture. The scantiness of the knowledge which Revelation furnishes on this subject, increases the difficulty of steadfastly and habitually fixing the mind on it: but for this very reason it is the more important that we *should* endeavour so to dwell on it as to make the most of what little knowledge we have, and accustom ourselves to reason from that knowledge, with due reverence and caution, as far as our reasoning powers will safely carry us.

It is a subject which of itself would appear likely to be interesting and agreeable to a sincere Christian; who would

naturally, one might think, dwell on the thoughts of that state in which he hopes to continue for ever. But many well-disposed persons are, I believe, little inclined to do so; partly from despair of forming any satisfactory notions on the subject, and partly, from not finding the notions they do form of heavenly bliss so pleasurable to their mind as they think they ought to find them. For (as was remarked in the last Lecture), the views which many writers present of the eternal state of the heirs of salvation, are more uninteresting to our feelings than there is any need to make them, from their dwelling so little on the *personal* nature of the whole of our religion; and among the rest, of the rewards held out by it. The Scriptures are indeed (as I before observed), very brief and scanty in their accounts of heavenly happiness: partly, no doubt, on account of the imperfection of our present faculties; which would be as incapable of comprehending many of the things that will take place, as a blind man is of understanding the nature of colours. Nor can our own reason, of

course, lead us to *understand*, without a revelation, all such things as we *might* have understood if they had been revealed. But still I am inclined to think that more *is* revealed to us on this subject, than many persons suppose; so far at least, revealed, that reason aided by Scripture may attain if not certainty, yet strong probability, on many points concerning which some men think it vain to inquire. And views, I think, both clearer and more pleasing than some people entertain, respecting the state of the blest, may thus be gained, without indulging in any presumptuous speculations.

Vast as must be the difference, in many respects, between the glorified condition of the Saints, and every thing they have experienced here, yet I doubt whether there may not be more resemblance between the two states,—the earthly and the heavenly—than some suppose. Sins and infirmities will of course be excluded from that better world—the enjoyments and perfections of sincere Christians will be immensely heightened; but if we look on the brightest and purest spots of human

nature and human life, as it is here, we may be led to form, I think, no unreasonable conjectures as to some things that will be hereafter. For, we should remember, that both worlds are the work of the same author;—this present world of trial, and the eternal world,—"the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." All that is suitable to this world alone, will be removed from that other; what is evil, will be taken away;—what is imperfect, will be made complete;—what is good, will be extended and exalted;—but there is no reason to suppose that any *further* change will be made than is *necessary* to qualify the faithful for that improved state;—that their human character will be altered, any further than it *wants* altering; and its dispositions and whole constitution unnecessarily reversed.

And a strong confirmation of these views is, that this life (as I have before remarked) is plainly represented in Scripture as not only a state of trial, but of *preparation* also, for a better world. Now this last circumstance surely implies that

the condition into which the Christian is required to bring himself in this life, must bear some degree of resemblance to that which is promised in the next; or else there could be nothing of *preparation* in the case. And this is accordingly expressly asserted by the Apostle John, who exhorts his hearers to imitate the example of Jesus, and to become as like Him as possible, *on the very ground*, that hereafter they may hope for a greater degree of resemblance to Him. "We know not what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like unto Him; for we shall see Him as He is; and every man that *hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.*"

With this foundation then for our reasoning; namely, the knowledge that the state of future happiness prepared for the faithful, will be one of a certain degree of resemblance to the Lord Jesus Christ, and also, that it will in some degree resemble that state of purity which they are directed to aim at in this world, in order to prepare and fit themselves for the joys that await them,—with this foundation, I say,

to stand on, in the outset, we may surely form some reasonable conjectures as to heavenly happiness: for we certainly have *some* knowledge of a thing, when we know what it is *like*.

Our Lord, in a discourse addressed to the Sadducees, mentions one particular in which the next life will be *un*like this: "in the resurrection," He says, "they neither marry nor are given in marriage: for neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." The reason for his *mentioning* this circumstance was, to silence silly cavil brought forward by the Sadducees. And there is an obvious reason why there should *be* this difference between the two states;—that of *mortal* Beings here below, of whom one generation must be born to supply the place of another that dies,—and that of the immortal Beings in the next world; those who, says He, cannot "die any more." But according to the views which some entertain of the next world, many additional circumstances of difference are in-

troduced, for which I can perceive no such reason. For example, it has been asserted by some, and is, I believe, taken for granted by others, that in that heavenly society there will be no mutual knowledge between those who had been friends on earth; nor even any such thing as *friendship* towards one person more than another; but that all such narrow feelings (as some represent them) will be swallowed up in universal and undistinguishing good-will towards the whole Body of glorified saints. Now, this view of the world to come, be it true or not, certainly is not the most alluring to the minds of men, such as even the best men now are.

Again it is not indeed expressly asserted, but seems rather to be supposed and implied, in the expressions and thoughts of most persons on this subject, that the heavenly life will be one of *inactivity*, and perfectly *stationary*;—that there will be nothing to be *done*,—nothing to be *learnt*,—no *advances* to be made;—nothing to be *hoped* for,—nothing to *look forward to*, except a continuance

in the very state in which the blest will be placed at once. Now this, also, is far from being an alluring view, to minds constituted as ours are. It is impossible for us to contemplate such a state,—even with the most perfect assent of the understanding to the assertion, that it will be exquisitely happy,—still I say, it is impossible for such minds as ours to contemplate such a state, without an idea of tediousness and wearisomeness forcing itself upon them. The ideas of *change*,—*hope*,—*progress*,—*improvement*,—*acquirement*,—*action*,—are so intimately connected with all our conceptions of happiness,—so interwoven with the very thought of all enjoyment,—that it is next to impossible for us to separate them. We can indeed easily enter into the idea of heaven's being a place of "*rest*," as we are assured it is; that is, of rest from all toilsome, painful, distressingly anxious exertions: and we can also very well understand the enjoyment of rest in itself (that is, the mere absence of all exertion), for a *time*, and as a *change*. But it is the contrast with exertion that alone makes

rest agreeable. Take away all exertion, and rest (or rather *inactivity*, for it can no longer be called *rest*) becomes so intolerably tedious to us, that even toilsome labour would at length be chosen by almost every one in preference.

Perfect security again from all danger of a *change for the worse*, is a highly gratifying idea; but the expectation of a change for the *better* is an essential ingredient in all our present notions of happiness. No good is *fully* enjoyed, unless it hold out a hope of some greater, at least some different, good to succeed it. The idea, therefore, of a state perfectly stationary and unchangeable to all eternity, and known to be so, although the understanding may be convinced of its happiness, never can be interesting to our feelings as they now are.

And it is in great measure, I think, in consequence of the prevalence of such notions, that so little interest is usually felt, even by the best Christians, in the future state held out to them. They *believe* indeed that it will be a happy state; but they do not feel any relish fo ch a

kind of happiness as they suppose it to be. They believe that their nature will be so far changed that such things will then be the most highly gratifying, as now present to their thoughts no alluring picture. But the very idea that this change will be so total as to reverse every point in their nature, whether good or bad, necessarily takes away their interest in the reward promised; because they cannot bring themselves to *feel* (though they may, to *believe*) that it is *they themselves*—the very persons they now are—that will obtain those rewards. You may be convinced that you shall hereafter be so totally altered as neither to wish for, nor to enjoy, anything of the same kind that you do now; but you can never completely bring yourself to feel that this totally different Being will be *yourself*, or to take much interest in what shall befal you in such a state.

To illustrate this last remark more fully: the ancient heathens had many fables of men being transformed into brutes of different kinds, by the power of their gods; and some seem to have firmly

believed in such occurrences: now I cannot think that any one of them who had this belief, if he imagined to himself the case of his being thus changed into an animal of some other species, could take any lively interest in the thought of what should then befal him. And even so it is in this case: if any one imagines himself undergoing a change into a Being as totally different from what he now is, in every disposition, wish, faculty, and enjoyment, as a brute is from a man, though he may firmly believe, he cannot conceive and feel, that this new Being is *himself*.

If, therefore, I could see any sufficient reason for entertaining such notions of a future state as those I have been mentioning, I should not deem it expedient to dwell habitually on the subject; since it would be one which, after all, could never be rendered attractive.

But as it is, I not only can see nothing, either in reason or Scripture, that compels us to take this uninteresting and repulsive view of a future state; but, on the contrary, I see strong reasons for entertaining quite opposite notions.

The foundation, as you may remember, on which to build our conjectures, was laid down to be, the resemblance between the glorified state of the faithful, and that into which they are continually striving to bring themselves;—a resemblance between heaven and everything most pure and virtuous, noblest and greatest in the true sense,—most sublimely good and happy,—most heavenly, in short,—on earth; and a resemblance, also, between Christ's sincere followers and Himself; "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able even to subdue *all things unto Himself.*" *This*, together with the exclusion of all evils and deficiencies,—all that is suitable only to a world of trial, like the present,—and the addition of such "good things as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive," make up the general notion we are to entertain of the new world provided for the faithful.

Now, according to these principles, it

will be found that such notions of a future state as I was describing just above, have not even any probability on their side. It is supposed, for example, that particular friendship will be swallowed up in universal charity; and that any partial regard towards one good man more than another is too narrow a feeling, and unworthy of a "saint made perfect." Do we then find any approach towards this supposed perfection in the best Christians on earth? Do we find that in proportion as they improve in charity towards all mankind, they become less and less capable of friendship,—less affectionate to their relations and connexions, and to the intimate companions whom they have selected from among their Christian brethren? Far from it; it is generally observed, on the contrary, that the best Christians, and the fullest both of *brotherly* love towards all "who are of the *household of faith*," and of universal tenderness and benevolence towards all their *fellow-creatures*, are also the warmest and steadiest in their friendships. Why, then, should it be otherwise hereafter? Why should pri-

vate friendship interfere with universal benevolence, in Heaven, more than it does on Earth? But there is a more decisive proof than this: no one can suppose that a Christian in his glorified state will be *more* exalted than his great Master here on earth; from Him we must ever remain at an immeasurable distance: we hope, indeed, to be free from the *sufferings* of our blessed Lord in his state of *humiliation* here below; but never to equal his perfections. Yet He was not incapable of friendship. He certainly loved indeed all mankind, more than any other man ever did; since (as Paul says) "while we were yet enemies, He died for us;" He loved especially the disciples who constantly followed him; but even among the Apostles, he distinguished one as more peculiarly and privately his *friend*—John was "*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*" Can *we* then ever be too highly exalted to be capable of friendship?

I am convinced, on the contrary, that the extension and perfection of friendship will constitute great part of the future

happiness of the blest. Many have lived in various and distant Ages and Countries, who have been in their characters,—(I mean not merely in their being generally *estimable*, but) in the agreement of their tastes, and suitableness of dispositions,—perfectly adapted for friendship with each other, but who of course could never *meet* in this world. Many a one selects, when he is reading history,—a truly pious Christian, most especially in reading Sacred history,—some one or two favourite characters, with whom he feels that a personal acquaintance would have been peculiarly delightful to him. Why should not such a desire be realized in a future state? A wish to see and personally know, for example, the Apostle Paul, or John, is the most likely to arise in the noblest and purest mind; I should be sorry to think such a wish absurd and presumptuous, or unlikely ever to be gratified. The highest enjoyment doubtless to the blest, will be the personal knowledge of their great and beloved Master; yet I cannot but think that some part of their happiness will consist in an intimate know-

ledge of the greatest of his followers also; and of those of them in particular whose peculiar qualities are, to each, the most peculiarly attractive!

In this world, again, our friendships are limited not only to those who live in the same Age and Country, but to a small portion even of them;—to a small portion even of those who are not unknown to us, and whom we know to be estimable and amiable, and who, we feel, *might* have been among our dearest friends. Our command of *time and leisure* to cultivate friendships, imposes a limit to their extent; they are bounded rather by the occupation of our *thoughts*, than of our *affections*. And the removal of such impediments in a better world, seems to me a most desirable, and a most probable change.

I see no reason, again, why those who *have been* dearest friends on earth, should not, when admitted to that happy state, continue to be so, with full knowledge and recollection of their former friendship. If a man is still to continue (as there is every reason to suppose) a social Being, and *capable* of friendship, it seems con-

trary to all probability that he should cast off or forget his former friends, who are partakers with him of the like exaltation. *He* will indeed be greatly changed from what he was on earth, and unfitted perhaps for friendship with such a Being as one of us is *now;* but his friend will have undergone (by supposition) a corresponding change.* And as we have seen those who have been loving play-fellows in childhood, grow up, if they grow up with good, and with like dispositions, into still closer friendship in riper years, so also it is probable that when *this* our state of *childhood* shall be perfected, in the maturity of a better world, the like attachment will continue between those companions who have trod together the christian path to glory, and have "taken sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends." A change to indifference to-

* The same thought is beautifully expressed by one of the most excellent of sacred poets, the author of the "Christian Year:"—

"That so, before the judgment-seat,
Though changed and glorified each face,
Not unremember'd we may meet,
For endless ages to embrace."

wards those who have fixed their hearts on the same objects with ourselves during this earthly pilgrimage, and have given and received mutual aid during their course, is a change as little, I trust, to be expected, as it is to be desired. It certainly is not such a change as the Scriptures teach us to prepare for.

And a belief that, under such circumstances, our earthly attachments will remain, is as beneficial as it is reasonable. It is likely very greatly to influence our *choice* of friends; which surely is no small matter. A sincere Christian would not indeed be, at any rate, utterly careless whether those were sincere Christians also, with whom he connected himself: but his care is likely to be much greater, if he hopes, that, provided he shall have selected such as are treading the same path, and if he shall have studied to promote their eternal welfare, he shall meet again, never to part more, those to whom his heart is most engaged here below. The hope also of rejoining in a better state the friend whom he sees advancing towards that state, is an additional spur

to his own virtuous exertions. Everything which can make Heaven appear more desirable, is a help towards his progress in christian excellence; and as one of the greatest of earthly enjoyments to the best and most exalted Christian, is to witness the happiness of a friend, so, one of the brightest of his hopes will be, that of exulting in the most perfect happiness of those most dear to him.

As for the grief, which a man may be supposed to feel, for the loss—the total and final loss—of some who may have been dear to him on earth, as well as of vast multitudes, I fear, of his fellow-creatures, I have only this to remark; that a wise and good man in this life, though he never ceases to use his endeavours to reclaim the wicked, and to diminish *every* kind of evil and suffering, yet, in cases where it is clear that no good can be done by him, strives, as far as possible (though often without much success) to *withdraw* his thoughts from evil which he cannot lessen, but which still, in spite of his efforts, will often cloud his mind. We *cannot* at pleasure draw off our thoughts

entirely from painful subjects which it is in *vain* to meditate about. The power to do this completely, when we will, would be a great increase of happiness; and this power therefore it is reasonable to suppose the blest will possess in the world to come:—that they will occupy their minds entirely with the thought of things agreeable, and in which their exertions can be of service; and will be able, by an effort of the will, completely to banish and exclude every idea that might alloy their happiness.

With respect, lastly, to the state of *rest* which the faithful are to hope for in the next world, although, as I have said, it must imply the absence of all painful toil, —the exclusion of all danger and distressing anxiety,—there seems not the least reason to suppose that it implies an inactive or a stationary state. The desire of some kind of *employment*,—the desire of *improvement* and advancement of some kind or other,—and among the rest the desire of advancement in the acquisition of knowledge,—are, all, natural to man; and not the least, but rather the most so,

to the best men. And that the blest in the next world will not be changed in these respects, this alone, I think, affords a strong presumption ;—*that there is no need* they should. These propensities are far from being evils, or faults, or weaknesses of our nature ; therefore there is no reason that the purification, and perfection, and exaltation of our nature, should extinguish them.

Nor is any such change, at all, what the Christian is directed to *prepare* himself for in this life. He is not called upon to check these propensities, but to direct them to right objects ;—to employ himself actively in promoting God's glory and the happiness of his brethren. And a very delightful employment it is, when it pleases God to crown his benevolent efforts with success, and remove in *part* those troubles and hindrances, which in a happier world will be removed entirely. He is encouraged also to keep continually advancing in knowledge and in goodness ; —to *improve* in acquaintance with the written Word of God, and in wisdom and virtue of every kind :—"to *grow* in grace,

and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ:" and the *perception* of this improvement is one of the highest enjoyments of the best men. Is it then likely that all this advancement should be totally stopped,—that all this activity should be quenched,—that all these dispositions should be changed,—in a glorified state? This indeed is what we might well believe, unwelcome though the belief would be, if we were assured of it in God's Word, or found any other good reason for it; but on the contrary, everything seems to favour the opposite supposition. And if the *wishes* and inclinations of the blest are still to remain, in these respects, similar to what they are now, of course, the life they are to lead (since it cannot be supposed their wishes will be *vain*,—their desires *un*gratified) must be of a corresponding nature.

That the blest in heaven shall be in some way actively employed in fulfilling God's will, and promoting the happiness of each other, and that their happiness, and knowledge of God's glorious works, shall be continually advancing, seems as reasonable a hope, as it must be, to a

right-minded Christian, a fervent wish;—a hope as well-founded, as it is cheering and delightful. To be ever advancing nearer and nearer to the nature of our Great Master, though we can never reach it,—to gaze ever closer and closer on those glorious and lovely qualities of which we can never understand the full perfection,—to advance ever further and further into the inexhaustible treasury of the knowledge of God's mighty works,—seems one of the sublimest and most interesting, and most encouraging, and at the same time one of the most rational expectations that a zealous Christian can form, respecting the blissful state prepared for him.

There is this additional reason for such a belief; that the holy angels, whom we are assured the glorified saints will in some respects resemble,* are actively *employed* (as we read in Scripture) in messages of love, and other services to man; as indeed the name *Angel* (that is, messenger) signifies; and we are told by the

* See Lecture VIII. p. 246, and also "Lectures on Angels."

Apostle Peter, that they "desire to look into" (to "stoop down" into, in the original) the mysterious dealings of God in the redemption of Man. To be employed then in such angelic occupations and thoughts as these, and to be continually advancing in this kind of life, without being troubled with any of those low earthly cares—those bodily and mental infirmities, which tend to draw off the attention, here below, even of the best Christians, from heavenly things, is just the sort of life which such Christians *are* actually preparing themselves for,—which they *would* look forward to with the most satisfaction,—and which I think they *may* look forward to with the most reason.

As for those who are engrossed with the things that pertain to this life alone,—who are devoted to sensual pleasures,—to worldly gain, honour, or power,—or to trifling pursuits, gaiety, and amusements,—*they* of course can have no relish for such a kind of life as I have been describing. Heaven would be no heaven to them, if they were placed there; because they have not prepared themselves for it,

nor cultivated any taste for its occupations.* They can hardly be said even to *desire* it, except as the *next best* thing to the present life, which they would prefer, if they had the choice; but which must, they know, come to an end. Their world, which they have set their hearts on, is on the Earth; they have not "laid up for themselves treasure in Heaven;"—they have evidently been preparing and qualifying themselves for the pursuits and enjoyments of this world alone.

There is, in the natural world, a remarkable phenomenon connected with insect-life, which has often occurred to my mind while meditating on this subject, as presenting a curious analogy.

Most persons know that every *butterfly* (the Greek name for which, it is remarkable, is the same that signifies also the SOUL,—*Psyche*) comes from a grub or caterpillar; in the language of naturalists called a *larva*. This last name (which signifies literally a *mask*) was introduced by Linnæus, because the caterpillar is a kind of outward covering or disguise, of the future butter-

* See Lecture V. towards the end.

fly within. For it has been ascertained by curious microscopic examination, that a distinct butterfly, only undeveloped and not full-grown, is contained within the body of the Caterpillar; that this latter has its own organs of digestion, respiration, &c., suitable to its larva-life, quite distinct from, and independent of, the future butterfly which it encloses. When the proper period arrives, and the life of the insect, in this its first stage, is to close, it becomes what is called a Pupa, enclosed in a Chrysalis or Cocoon (often composed of silk; as is that of the silkworm which supplies us that important article) and lies torpid for a time within this natural coffin, from which it issues, at the proper period, as a perfect butterfly.

But sometimes this process is marred. There is a numerous tribe of insects well-known to Naturalists, called *Ichneumon flies;* which in their larva-state are *parasitical;* that is, inhabit, and feed on, other larvæ. The Ichneumon-fly being provided with a long sharp sting, which is in fact an *ovipositor* [egg-layer] pierces with this the body of a caterpillar in

several places, and deposits her eggs, which are there hatched, and feed, as grubs [larvæ] on the inward parts of their victim.

The common cabbage-caterpillar (producing a white butterfly) which often does such mischief in our gardens, is often thus attacked: and these being common near our houses, are more easily observed than most others.

A most wonderful circumstance connected with this process is, that a caterpillar which has been thus attacked goes on feeding, and apparently thriving quite as well during the whole of its larva-life, as those that have escaped. For, by a wonderful provision of instinct, the ichneumon-grubs within do not injure any of the organs of the larva, but feed only on the future butterfly enclosed within it. And, consequently, it is hardly possible to distinguish a caterpillar which has these enemies within it from those that are untouched.

But when the period arrives for the close of the larva-life, the difference appears. You may often observe the

common cabbage-caterpillars retiring, to undergo their change, into some sheltered spot—such as the walls of a summer-house; and some of them—those that have escaped the parasites—assuming the pupa-state, from which they emerge butterflies. But as for the others, the ichneumon-grubs at this period issue forth, and spin their little cocoons of bright yellow silk, (about the size and shape of grains of wheat) from which they are to issue as flies. Of the unfortunate caterpillar nothing remains but an empty skin. The hidden butterfly has been secretly consumed.

Now, when you are contemplating with wonder this most curious phenomenon, consider whether there is not something analogous to it in the condition of some of our race:—whether a man may not have a kind of secret enemy within his own bosom, destroying his soul,—*Psyche*,—though without interfering with his well-being *during the present stage* of his existence; and whose presence may never be detected till the time arrives when the *last great change* should take place.

Christian reader, reflect whether this may not be your case. And remember that it is in your power, now, through the help that is promised, to detect and destroy these secret but deadly enemies within you!

As for those who live in strife or malice, —the envious, the revengeful, the liars, the slanderers, the profane, and such as these,—they, it is plain, are fitting themselves for the society of evil spirits, even the Devil, who is the father of lies, and his malignant angels. The change which could qualify these last, and the others just mentioned, for admittance into heavenly bliss, or even for enjoyment of it, if they were in the midst of it, is one which must be begun in the appointed place, here on Earth; as they may be well assured, that, if not, it will never take place after death. And it must be begun speedily; for it is plainly impossible that such a total change of heart,—of desires, —wishes,—tastes,—thoughts,—dispositions, can be accomplished on a death-bed; or even during a few weeks of feeble and decaying health.

Consider, therefore, I entreat you, now that there is time, what it is you have to hope for;—what sort of life it is that is held out to the Christian in a better world, —and of which if he fails, there is nothing for him but a "fearful looking forward to of judgment to come;" even the curse pronounced on the disobedient; and strive, since the prospect of *such* a heaven is set before you, "in heart and mind thither to ascend," as far as possible, while you remain here. Prepare yourself in short for the heavenly happiness which you hope is prepared for *you*. Hold frequent intercourse, in public and private worship, with the Lord, with whom you hope "ever to dwell" in the next world; and who hath promised that in this world "where two or three are gathered together in his name, He will be in the midst of them." And attend frequently at his holy table, according to his commandment, to commemorate his infinite love towards you, and, as the Apostle Paul expresses it, "to show the Lord's death until He come." Remember, that one great object in the appointment of that ordinance, was to

remind Christians that they are fellow-members of Christ's body,—branches of "the true vine," from which they derive all the nourishment of their souls,—"living stones" of what the Apostle calls "the temple of the Holy Ghost," namely, the christian Church,—the Society in which Christians are united with, and under, Christ, the "chief corner-stone." And strive to impress it habitually on your mind, especially whenever you partake of the Lord's supper, which is an appointed means of imparting to you the "Spirit of Christ,"—that this mystical temple is to endure for ever;—that this spiritual union of faithful Christians with their Lord, and with each other, will never come to an end, but on the contrary will be improved and perfected in a better world.

Your christian path will thus become smoother, and brighter, and more cheering, the further you advance in it; and when your course on earth is finished, you may trust confidently that it will be continued in a better state, to all eternity;

you may trust that God will have "laid up for you" (as Paul says) "a crown of glory," which is promised also to "all those who love his appearing." (2 Tim.)

LECTURE XI.

Prevailing Mistakes respecting a Christian Departure.

If it were fixed that you must before long leave your home, never to return, and set sail for a distant and unknown land, you would naturally be anxious in the first place to learn as many particulars as possible respecting this Country where you were to settle;—you would wish to know what accounts of it might be believed on good authority,—and what were to be rejected as idle tales,—and what points, again, were doubtful, so that nothing could be certainly known about them, till you should arrive there. And when you should have learnt all that could be known on *this* subject, you would be anxious to enquire in the next place into the particulars of your departure from

home; how soon you were required to hold yourself in readiness to set sail,—what provisions and other stores were to be laid in,—and what other preparations to be made for your voyage, and for your final settlement; and how, and when, these preparations were to be begun.

Now such is actually the situation of all of us. We are all to launch forth in a short time from the shore of this present life into the regions of eternity. I have been discussing with you the subject of the Country whither you are bound;—collecting as many particulars respecting it as we have any means of knowing; and proposing conjectures respecting some others; and pointing out what things there are so completely hidden that we cannot form even a reasonable conjecture about them. I proceed now to call your attention to some circumstances connected with our setting out on this great voyage,—our departure from this world to enter the other.

For I have found, that respecting this departure,—respecting the change itself from our present state to that which

succeeds it,—there prevail many opinions and habits of thinking and of feeling, which appear to me very erroneous; and which, if they *are* erroneous, are likely to produce mischievous effects.

The observations I shall offer on this subject are designed, I wish you to remember, for *your own* warning—to guide your own conduct,—to guard you against your own dangers, and secure your own safety; not to encourage you to speculate as to what is the probable lot of your deceased *neighbours*.

I. In the first place most persons consider it as highly important that a man should have ample time allowed him to *prepare for death;* meaning by that phrase, to *prepare for the next life;*—to make his peace with God, as they sometimes express it;—to repent of his sins;—to learn any thing he may have been ignorant of, relative to his religion;—to put on a pious and devout frame of mind,—and to embrace by faith the offer of salvation through Christ. And by the *time allowed* for making this preparation for death, they usually mean, not the

whole space of each man's life, but a certain number of weeks, days, or at least hours, after he shall have received distinct warning that his end is approaching.

II. Hence, it is, by such persons, of course considered as a most dreadful thing to die *suddenly;* taking this word "suddenly," not in the sense in which I shall explain it presently, but, without having had notice, some time before, that death was just at hand. And this, not only in the case of such as have been leading a careless or wicked life: it is thought a calamity even for a good Christian to be cut off unexpectedly,—by a fit, for instance,—or by some accident,—without having had, the day or the hour before, any expectation of speedy death, and without having been enabled to make any such preparation as I have been speaking of.

III. Accordingly when any one is labouring under a dangerous illness, and is suspected not to be aware of his danger, it is usually reckoned a point of duty in those near him, to warn him that in all likelihood he is about to die; not

merely when there are any worldly affairs for him to settle, but even when that is not the case, in order that he may have the more space to prepare for death. And this is considered so essential, that I have known the sick man's friends insist on giving him this warning, even in spite of the remonstrances of the physician, who has declared (when there is yet a possibility of recovery) that the agitation thus produced in the patient's mind may destroy the remaining chance of life.

IV. Again, it is commonly considered as a most important part of this preparation, that the party should have had the advantage of the attendance of a clergyman, and should, on his death-bed, have received what is commonly called *the* Sacrament (meaning, the communion of the Lord's Supper), as if there were but *one* sacrament; that of Baptism being too commonly regarded with very little serious reverence. And if the person be one who has absented himself from the Lord's Supper all his life before, it is considered as peculiarly important and most efficacious towards his salvation,

that he should receive this rite in his last moments; many persons even considering the duty as completely fulfilled, if a man shall have, *once* in his life, partaken of the Lord's Supper. And many, for this reason, purposely defer receiving it till their last illness, from a belief that after having received this sacrament, a man is more bound to lead a christian life than he was before.* Others again, would indeed censure the imprudence of thus deferring this duty, on account of the danger that a man may chance to leave the world without having performed it at all; on the same principle that they would blame a man for deferring to make his will during the time of his health; yet seem to think that, as in this last case, so also in the other, if any one *is* so fortunate as to have the opportunity, on his death-bed, whether of making his will, or of receiving the Sacrament, as the case may be, for *him* at least there is nothing to be regretted on that score.

If again any one has been a con-

* See Address on "Self-Examination," published by the Christian Knowledge Society.

stant communicant during his hours of health, still it is considered by many as a deplorable circumstance if he should have been deprived of the opportunity of privately communicating, just before his death.

V. As for those who have lived in irreligion or in sin, there are differences of opinion as to the efficacy of this preparation for death in their case. Most persons, I believe, think it a great advantage to a condemned criminal, for example, or one struck with a mortal disease, to have several days allowed him, after sentence is past, or the warning given, to attend to the concerns of his soul; but some do not venture to pronounce positively how far a dying repentance will avail to the salvation of the soul; while others maintain that repentance and faith, even at the last hour,—at the close of the most reprobate life,—are an infallible passport to heaven. And some consider the case of the penitent robber on the cross, and that of the labourers (in the parable) who came to work in the vineyard at the eleventh hour, and received the same

wages with the rest, as affording scriptural authority for this doctrine.

VI. Again, it is often considered as a circumstance of high importance, that the dying man should have expressed the fullest *confidence* of his own salvation, and should have departed with a triumphant assurance of being admitted into the regions of eternal joy. The surviving relatives of one about whose future condition there might seem good reason to feel much dread, are in general more or less at their ease, in proportion as *he* has appeared so. If he shall have died with calm and confident trust of being on his way to a better world, it seldom occurs to them to inquire as to (what one would think the most important question) whether he was likely to have *good or ill grounds* for his confidence; or, rather, they seem to suppose it impossible that he should be mistaken in this point, and that one who has been perhaps deceiving himself all his life, should deceive himself on his death-bed; as if, in short, a special revelation were bestowed on each man just at the point of death, to let him know with infallible

certainty whether he was going to Heaven or not.

VII. Another point about which surviving relatives are in general very solicitous, and which therefore they may be supposed to regard as of great consequence in their own case, is whether the dying man departed easily, without any violent struggle or agonizing pain, just at last. I say "just at last," because I have commonly found that it is not so much concerning the sufferings of a friend during the whole of his past life, or even during the illness of which he dies, that this peculiar anxiety exists. Provided they are but assured that, just at last, he was calm and easy, and expired without a struggle, they are pretty well reconciled to the knowledge of his having suffered severe pain before; and sometimes even seem to think the more favourably of his prospect of salvation on that very account,* as if his sufferings might have

* This notion seems to be a remnant of the doctrines respecting Purgatory of the Romanists, who hold that pains endured in this life are a commutation for those of Purgatory.

gone some way at least towards expiating his sins, and making atonement for him, and might have contributed to exempt him from suffering in the other world. But to be relieved from suffering just at the last, and to die easily, is regarded either as a mark of acceptance with God, or for some other reason, as far more important than any other exemption from suffering through life.

VIII. Lastly, it is by many considered as of great importance that a man's remains should have been interred in consecrated ground (especially if it be within the walls of the Church), after having had the Church-service pronounced over them; and that his bones should remain secure and unmolested.

To sum up then, in a few words, the circumstances in which most people seem to think a happy death consists,—which they enquire about with the most anxiety, in the case of their friends,—and about which, it may be supposed, they care the most in their own case;—if a man has had distinct notice some considerable time beforehand that his end was approaching,

and has thus been enabled to occupy that interval in what is usually termed preparation for death;—if he has been attended by a minister, and has received the sacrament of the Lord's Supper a little before his departure; if, though he may have suffered considerably in the course of the disease, he at last dies calm and easy both in body and mind, in full possession of his faculties, and professing the most perfect confidence of his acceptance with God; and finally, if his body receives what is called christian burial in consecrated ground, and still more perhaps if a handsome monument is erected over it;—this person's death is thought to combine all the circumstances which are usually reckoned (not indeed in so many words, but in men's feelings, and practical views) the most desirable, important, and satisfactory.

Now if such opinions, such cares, and such feelings as I have been describing, are rational and christian, we may expect to find them agreeable to the christian *Scriptures;* if otherwise, they cannot be unattended with danger. Whatever tends

to draw off our attention from that which is undeniably, and beyond all comparison, the most important business of a man's life—a right preparation for eternity,—and to fix our minds on matters which are either of no consequence at all, or at least comparatively trifling, cannot but lead to the most mischievous consequences. And such, you will find on reflection, taking the Scriptures for your guide, is the case with all those circumstances which are often considered as making the difference between a happy and a deplorable end. They are things either totally insignificant, or such as have so little weight in comparison of others, as hardly to be worth a thought, when we are reflecting on so momentous a subject as eternal happiness or final ruin.

It is certainly very natural and unblameable to desire, for ourselves and our friends, a death without pain; because no pain is in itself desirable. It is equally natural also to wish that our bodies may be decently buried, and may be laid beside those of our christian brethren. Nor ought we to condemn any natural

feelings or wishes, as wrong and *irrational*, merely on the ground that they are not *derived* from Reason: it is enough if they are not *at variance* with Reason or Scripture, and are completely under their *control*. But we should bring under this control those feelings not least, which are, as it were, sanctified in our eyes by their having something of a religious or moral character; for one who, on that ground, gives himself up blindly and unsuspectingly to their guidance, may fall into the weakest superstition, or the wildest enthusiasm. Our feelings, even the meanest of them, are a part of our nature; but all, even the noblest of them, are *but* a part, and not the supreme and directing part of our nature. And Christianity, accordingly, addresses itself indeed to the heart, but addresses itself to the head also: "My brethren," it says, "be not *children in understanding*: howbeit in *malice* be ye children, but in *understanding be men*."

It is, as I have said, natural and allowable, to prefer an easy to a painful death, and to wish for a decent interment. But

what grounds are there, in Reason or in Scripture, for supposing that anything of this kind can make any difference in a man's final doom,—in his condition for eternity? And how infinitely insignificant in comparison is everything which does *not* make this difference! All the sufferings and enjoyments which end with this life, or relate to this world alone, are, if placed beside a happy eternity, less than a grain of sand compared with a mountain. And when a man is dead, if he retains any recollection of his having suffered much or little pain while on earth—if he has any knowledge how his corpse was disposed of,—we may be sure he neither grieves nor rejoices at anything of the kind, nor cares at all about it. Some of the early christian martyrs, after a life spent in sufferings for righteousness' sake, were delivered by their persecutors to be devoured by wild beasts, or were burnt alive, and their ashes scattered to the winds. All this they endured firmly in Christ's cause, knowing that their "light affliction, which was but for a moment, wrought for them a far more exceeding

and eternal weight of glory." Still, if they had had their choice, they would have avoided all these things, if they could have done so without shrinking from their duty. But now that they are dead, and their sufferings all *past*, we may be sure (supposing them to be in a state of consciousness, and to remember what is past) that they can feel no regret whatever on that account, nor would wish that any of these things had happened otherwise. Engrossed as men are apt to be with the concerns of this world while they remain in it, we cannot suppose they continue to be so after they have left it. Even during the continuance of life, we are not apt to grieve at any past sufferings we may have undergone, if we are tolerably secure that the like will not take place again. Indeed to many persons the remembrance of what they have gone through even affords much pleasure, when they contrast these evils with their present ease and security. And little as we are apt to think of the concerns of eternity while this life lasts, we cannot doubt that in the next world we shall think of nothing else. We

shall think of this life, if we have any thought of it at all, merely with a view to the opportunities, employed or lost, for working out our salvation,—the duties fulfilled or omitted,—the temptations we shall have yielded to or withstood.

Again, I need hardly point out to you that there is no reason to suppose that any sufferings from disease, poverty, or other worldy affliction, can be in themselves meritorious, and likely to entitle any one to acceptance with God. If indeed any person supports such trials with christian patience and fortitude, *that* will doubtless make him an object of God's favour; but the same may be said of any other trial. Health, and power, and wealth, are also great trials; as our Lord implied when He said, "how hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven!" and any one who withstands such a temptation, and makes a christian use of these advantages, will doubtless be rewarded no less than one who had equally well encountered trials of a different kind. No man of sense can suppose that the rich man in the parable is described as punished merely

because he had been rich, or Lazarus as rewarded, merely because he had been a beggar full of sores. But if we suppose the beggar humbly and patiently submitting to his lot, and the rich man, as setting his heart on the glories and the indulgences of the present life (as seems to be implied in the expression, "thou in thy life-time receivedst *thy* good things"), this will sufficiently account for the difference in their future conditions. And that man must be sadly ignorant of the christian religion, who can think that his sins can be atoned for by his *own* sufferings, either from sickness or any other cause. *That* would be making himself his own Redeemer, instead of Jesus Christ, "who suffered on the cross," the "*just* for the unjust," and by whose "stripes we are healed."

Equally unsupported by Scripture is the prevailing notion which attaches so much importance to the dying man's own hopes and feelings respecting the salvation of his soul. For where are we told in Scripture, that how-much-soever a man may have deceived himself all his life, respecting his own character and spiritual condi-

tion, it will be distinctly revealed to him just at the point of death, whether he is accepted with God or not? Where is it promised that every man shall be saved who feels and professes on his death-bed a confidence that he shall be saved? Our Lord himself speaks of some as even coming forward to claim his favour "on that day," (the Day of Judgment,) "saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many mighty works:" to whom He will reply, "I never knew you."

It does indeed sometimes happen that the veil of self-deceit, which has long kept a man in ignorance of the condition of his soul, is removed just at last; and the delusion being at an end, the sinner becomes conscience-stricken and terrified. But it would be most extravagant to infer from these cases, that no different cases can ever occur;—that because some men are undeceived just at the last, therefore none can continue deceived. This, I say, would be a most extravagant conclusion, even if we had no proof to the contrary. But we have, unhappily, the most abundant

proofs; we see the instances every day of men dying in the errors in which they have lived. An ignorant Christian, for example, of the Romish or the Greek church, trusts for salvation, in a great measure, to his prayers to saints, who, he fancies, are his intercessors with God,—to various superstitious ceremonies—to sacred relics, as they are called, hung about his body, such as pieces of wood supposed to be of the cross on which Christ suffered; bones, or locks of hair, of dead men, and the like;—to masses sung for him by the priests; and perhaps he trusts to have earned God's highest favour by persecuting and burning other Christians, whom he calls heretics. What multitudes have died as well as lived in these frightful errors, with a full confidence of salvation built on this miserable foundation! I am not saying that no one holding these errors can be saved, supposing him not to have had sufficient opportunities of learning the truth; but it is quite plain that he cannot be saved *by any of these things*, in which he puts his trust; and therefore his continuing to

trust in them to the last, as so many do, proves that a man may be most grossly deceived to the last, in matters pertaining to the state of his soul. And if one man is deceived in one way, others may be no less deceived in other ways.

It is, indeed, to be expected, generally speaking, that a sincere Christian will depart with a joyful confidence of a happy immortality. His trust in God's promises, and his own consciousness of having sincerely laboured to "walk worthy of his christian calling," naturally lead to such a departure. But even this we have no right to regard as a rule without any exceptions. There are some diseases, of which the natural effect is to produce unreasonable despondency, groundless apprehensions, and agitation of mind; and if a man chance to die under the influence of such a disease, and to have, in consequence, no cheering ray of hope shed over his death-bed, it would be most rash and uncharitable to conclude that he has lost God's favour, and is doomed to eternal perdition. But even if it were universally true that whoever really is accepted of

God must die with a triumphant assurance of it,—even if this, I say, were universally true, it would not at all follow that no one can have the same assurance *without* having equally good grounds for it;—that *all* who have this confident expectation of going to heaven, will actually be received there. A man's own expectations, in short, whether favourable or unfavourable, afford us grounds for judging of his future condition, as far, and only as far, as we have good reason for believing that those expectations are well-founded.

We are not called on, however, to judge, one way or the other, as to the safety or the danger, of a neighbour, who is dying, or dead; but to take heed to our own. All that I have said, and am about to say, on this subject, has reference to your own case, not to another's,—to the future, not to the past,—and to what you may or may not safely look forward to for yourself; not to any curious inquiries or presumptuous decisions as to the doom of those who are departed.

I have said that it is unreasonable for any one who has been sincerely endea-

vouring to lead a christian life, to suppose himself rejected of God, from his not feeling, on the approach of death, that exulting confidence and holy joy, of which perhaps the nature of his disease deprives him; and that, as this would be, for him, unreasonable, so, for any one else to judge hardly of his condition on this account, would be highly uncharitable.

It may be added, that if it happen to one who has been a regular attendant at the Lord's Table, to have no opportunity of receiving that holy Communion in his last illness, it would be unreasonable for him to be thence troubled in mind, and distrustful of God's favour; and most unjustifiable for another to think the worse of his prospect of acceptance. Nay, supposing such a Christian (I mean a regular and devout communicant) should himself decline receiving the Lord's Supper in a private room, from feeling that this is less conformable to the original institution by Christ Himself, which was designed to be (as the name implies) a *communion*, or *common participation*, by a whole christian Congregation, of the symbols of Christ's

body and blood, by which is represented his Holy Spirit:—should such, I say, be the feeling and the decision of any pious Christian on his death-bed, no one would have any right to censure him for it.

As for any one who does wish to receive the Lord's Supper privately in his sick room, even though he may have been guilty of neglecting this Ordinance hitherto, we have no right to refuse to administer it to him, provided he appear to be in a fit state of mind for receiving it. But no one *can* be in a fit state, or can derive any "inward spiritual grace" from "the outward and visible sign," who mistakes altogether the nature and intent of the Lord's Supper. And this is the case with every one who considers it not as a duty *habitually* to celebrate this sacred Ordinance, but thinks it sufficient to defer it till his last illness, and that it will then operate as a charm (like the "extreme unction" of our forefathers) to secure his salvation;—who desires to receive this sacrament *because* he thinks himself dying, and would *not* do so if he

expected to recover, lest he should thus have bound himself (as he imagines) to a stricter observance of God's laws than would otherwise be required of him:—and who does not sincerely and deeply bewail, among his other sins, his past neglect (if he have been guilty of such neglect) of this duty, during the time of his health; steadfastly purposing, should his life be spared, to be henceforth a *regular* attendant at the Lord's Table. A man, I say, who thus misapprehends the whole character of this ordinance, knows not what he is about when he celebrates it, and cannot therefore derive any spiritual benefit from so doing.

As for the efficacy of a death-bed repentance, in the case of one whose life has been spent in sin or in thoughtlessness, different opinions, as I have said, are entertained by different persons. But this, I suppose, will be admitted by all; that when (as is too often the case) a man who supposes himself dying, mistakes remorse and terror for a truly christian state of mind,—when his religious impressions

(at least what he calls, and believes to be so) are merely the effect of present pain and danger, and are such as would immediately evaporate and come to nothing if he were unexpectedly to recover,—when, in short, his state is such that, in case of restoration to health and security, he would immediately relapse into his former irreligion or sin; which is found to be the case with a large proportion of those supposed penitents, when they *are* thus unexpectedly relieved;—when, I say, a sinner's repentance is of this character, most, I suppose, would fear that it must be unavailing.*

If, on the other hand, the dying sinner be in such a frame of mind that he *would*, if his life were spared, devote the whole of it sincerely to God's service, and if the all-knowing Searcher of hearts foresees, what He alone *can* foresee (for neither the penitent himself, nor any other, can, in

* There are two words in Greek, both of which we translate "repentance;" one signifying merely "regret for the past," the other, properly, a "change of disposition." It is to this last alone that the promises of Scripture are made;—to *Metanoia*, not *Metameleia*.

such a case, have any certain knowledge of the future), that this person would so live, if his life were prolonged, we certainly cannot pronounce that in such a case his repentance will not be accepted; nor are we forbidden to hope it; though he has lost the opportunity of "bringing forth *fruits* meet for repentance." It is not for Man to set bounds to the divine mercy; but, on the other hand, it is no less rash for Man to presume to extend it beyond what God has distinctly promised, and to hold out a confident assurance that such a repentance *will* be accepted, if we have not Scripture authority for that confidence. And that there is no such Scripture authority seems sufficiently plain from this: that all the passages of Scripture which are referred to with this view are most grossly and palpably perverted and misrepresented.

For example, the one I lately mentioned, the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, will appear, if studied with even a moderate degree of attention, to be totally foreign from the purpose. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man

that is an householder; who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny* a-day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went. Again he went about the sixth, and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right ye shall receive. So when it was evening, the master of the vineyard saith unto his servants, Call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they re-

* The Roman *Denarius* (called by our translators a "penny") was equal, in silver, to 7½*d.*, and appears to have been the ordinary day's wages.

ceived every man a penny. But when the first came they expected to receive more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it they murmured against the master, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take what is thine and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Art thou envious at my being bountiful?"*

Now you should observe that the labourers who did not begin to work till the eleventh hour, gave as a reason for their standing idle, "because no man hath hired us." They are not described

* This, and the other passages, quoted from Scripture, I have translated exactly from the original; retaining, however, the words of our translation, except where (from being somewhat obsolete, or from any other cause,) they did not so clearly express the sense to readers of the present day.

as having been *offered employment before, and having refused* it: no blame whatever was imputed to them; and accordingly, the lord of the vineyard was graciously pleased to take the will for the deed, and to pay them a whole day's wages; because it was not through any fault of theirs that they had not done the whole day's work. The case of these labourers evidently is designed to represent that of the Gentiles, to whom the knowledge of the true God was then about to be revealed, many ages later than it had been taught to the Jews. It is of these our Lord was speaking when he said, "They shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. They were left uncalled, as it were, till the eleventh hour, and were then put upon a level with the Jews; who were on that account disposed to murmur, and regard them with an evil eye. The Gentile nations, I say, and those individuals of the Gentiles who did not hear the glad tidings of Christ's kingdom till late in their lives, are plainly the

persons denoted by the labourers in the parable. It can have no reference whatever to the case of those Christians who have *had* and have *resisted* God's gracious invitations, every day of their lives, and have *refused* to think of the next world till they are just about leaving this. Whatever excuse they may have to plead for such conduct, at least they cannot plead with any truth "because no man hath hired us."

Equally foreign from the question is the case so often appealed to, of the penitent robber* on the cross. What his former sins had been,—how long beforehand he had repented of them,—and how long he had been a believer in Jesus, are points on which we must remain ignorant, because the Scriptures give us no information. It is usually taken for granted, indeed, that his contrition for his sins, and his faith in Christ, took place, for the first time, just at the moment when he uttered those words which are recorded of him. But the circumstances of the

* He was what we call a *robber;* for that is the proper sense of the original word.

case prove (as I shall presently show) the impossibility of this. And, even supposing it possible, it would not be the less rash for any one to assume that this was the fact: because it is what, even if true, we could not possibly know.

Even on that supposition, however, the case of the penitent robber must still be quite unlike any that can possibly occur in the present day. The faith which he displayed is the most extraordinary of any that is recorded.

To understand this fully, you should recollect that the Jews universally expected their Christ or Messiah to appear as a great temporal prince, to deliver their nation from the dominion of the Romans —to overthrow all their enemies—and to make them the greatest people of the earth. Many accordingly were disgusted ("offended," or scandalized, as the sacred historians express it) at the humble station in which Jesus appeared, while He proclaimed the kingdom of heaven as at hand. And even those who believed on Him were so strongly impressed with the same expectation, that they endeavoured

"to take Him by force to make Him a king." His very apostles partook of these feelings: for we find Peter rebuking Him* when He spoke of his being scourged, and crucified, "saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; there shall no such thing happen unto thee." And it is likely that Judas Iscariot, in betraying Him, did not meditate his destruction, but thought He would be forced into some display of miraculous power to save Himself from his enemies, and that thus He would at once be acknowledged as King of the Jews. For Judas must have known that Jesus *had* such power, and could (as He himself expressed it) "pray to the Father, and He would send Him more than twelve legions of angels." But when his enemies, to all appearance prevailed,—when He submitted to stripes, insults, and finally, the most ignominious kind of death, the triumph of the unbelievers was complete, and the last hopes of his followers seem to have faded away. They were as little

* Or rather, remonstrating with Him: see "Lectures on the Apostles;" Lecture on the Apostle Peter.

prepared as his adversaries for such a strange and unexpected doctrine as that of a *suffering* Messiah, who should through death "enter into his glory." One of them had betrayed Him; another, who had boasted of the most courageous attachment, repeatedly denied Him; the rest "forsook Him and fled." His enemies exulted in the proof which, to their minds, his degrading death afforded, that He could not be the anointed of God; saying, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross, and we will believe." That He should "save Himself," was the only way they could imagine of his making good his pretensions. And accordingly one of his fellow-sufferers reviled Him in the same terms; "If thou be the Son of God, save thyself and us."* Then it was that the other malefactor not only rebuked his companion, and bore witness to the innocence of Jesus (saying, "This man hath done nothing amiss;" which proves, by the way, that he must have known a good deal about

* See Note at the end of this Lecture.

Him before,) but acknowledged Him as a triumphant Sovereign about to enter upon his kingdom. He does not merely acknowledge his divine power: he does not ask to be saved from death; but to be saved after death;—to be remembered when Jesus should "come in his kingdom."* He therefore appears to have understood, or at least suspected, what none of the other disciples at that time had any idea of, the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom;—that it was "not of this world;" and that the rewards and glories reserved for his followers were those of the world beyond the grave. We are not sure, indeed, that the dying malefactor was quite so far enlightened as fully to take in this view: but at any rate he did look for a kingdom of God which the *death* of Jesus was not to destroy, but to complete; he understood that, in some

* Luke xxiii. 42. Observe that "*into* thy kingdom," is a mis-translation; it should be "*in* thy kingdom." The meaning is, "at thy second coming in triumphant glory." Thus we read in Heb. ix. 28, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

way or other, "the Christ must suffer these things, and enter into his glory."

This was surely a most extraordinary instance of faith; especially considering how strongly all the current Jewish prejudices respecting the promised Messiah set the other way;—how completely wedded they were to the expectation of a temporal Deliverer. And whether this man were himself a Jew or a Gentile, he must have known that these were the expectations entertained by all parties. Yet in opposition to all these prejudices, this man acknowledged as his Lord and King, —as the Supreme Ruler of the unseen world,—a person who was nailed to a cross beside him, derided by his enemies, deserted by his friends, and about to conclude a persecuted life by the most ignominious death.

Such was the faith of the crucified robber. Yet it is worth while to observe that his was not a blind belief without evidence. Such is not that "faith without which it is impossible to please God;" but would rather be foolish credulity. The foolish credulity of those Jews, who

believed, against all reason, that Jesus wrought miracles through the Prince of Demons, was reckoned not excess of faith, but want of faith. That faith which is "counted for righteousness," consists, not in believing *without* evidence, but in being *open* to evidence:—in candidly and patiently weighing the reasons; and in resolving to receive and *acknowledge whatever there is good ground for believing, however contrary it may be to our expectations, wishes, and prejudices.* The many mighty works which Jesus had done afforded a very sufficient proof that He must have come from God. And these miraculous works must have been well known to this man; not only because they had been openly displayed, and were *generally* talked of in all parts of that country, but, because, moreover, it plainly appears from the very words recorded, that he must have known Jesus and been known by Him (in all likelihood as his disciple) some considerable time before. The words—the only ones recorded—in which he addresses our Lord on the cross, are such as no one would ever have used in

addressing for the first time one to whom he was personally a stranger. "Lord, *remember* me!" You observe he does not even confess his sins, and implore forgiveness;—he does not say, like the publican in the parable, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The only allusion he makes to his sins is in a sharp rebuke to his fellow-sufferer, "we receive the due reward of our deeds;" but to Jesus he addresses nothing but a petition to be remembered in his approaching kingdom. Nor does Jesus say to him, as He was used to do to repentant offenders, "thy sins are forgiven thee." A penitent he doubtless was, because otherwise he would not have been accepted; but his penitence evidently did not take place on the cross; and therefore we may be sure that his penitence and pardon had taken place some time before. In short the words recorded as exchanged between him and the Saviour, are such as show, both by the very *form of expression*, that they must have had intercourse before, and again by the *matter and sense* of them, that he must have been, before, a believer in Jesus, and an accepted follower.

But his faith stood a trial, before which that of all the other disciples was shaken. Having once, on good and sufficient grounds, believed on Jesus as the Christ,* he remained unshaken in his trust, even at the moment when the enemies of the crucified King were filled with triumph, and his disciples with doubt or despair. However strange, unexpected, and hard to be explained, his present situation might be, that was no reason against acknowledging Him as the Son of God, and trusting that God would bring about his own ends in the way man would least expect or comprehend. The commendable faith of the crucified robber consisted not in believing without good reason; but in listening to reason, notwithstanding all the strange and revolting circumstances which tended to bias the mind the other way; and which in fact did bias the mind, and shake the faith, of every one besides.

Whether any one of us does actually

* The reader should never fail to recollect that "the Christ," or "Messias," is the *title*, not the name, of Jesus, denoting that he was the "anointed" Priest and King.

possess equal faith with this man, can be known only to the all-wise God. But we may be sure that no one of us can *display* equal faith with his; because the circumstances are such as can never occur again.

I am not saying, you will observe, that no dying penitent in the present day can be accepted; but only, that if he is, it cannot be from his case being at all like that of the robber on the cross; to which it must be totally unlike. The instance is nothing to the present purpose; but is important to us, as showing how highly acceptable in the sight of our Master is an extraordinary degree of well-grounded, rational, and truly christian faith.

There is an expression of an ancient writer, relative to this transaction, which I have heard quoted with great approbation; that "one was saved, that none might despair; and only one, that none might presume." To me it appears utterly incorrect. If it had been recorded that the two robbers behaved exactly *alike;* —that *both* were penitent, or *both* hardened; and that one was accepted, and the other rejected, then the remark would have

been reasonable; and on *that very account* it is altogether unreasonable, seeing that the very reverse is recorded. Is there not enough to account for the acceptance of the one and not the other? One was hardened, unbelieving, impenitent; the other, humble, repentant, and full of the most extraordinary faith. The whole history leads us to suppose that if both had been such as the one, both would have obtained favour: and that if both had been such as the other, neither would have obtained it. What is there in the rejection of a hardened unbeliever, to check the hopes, nay, the confident trust, of those "who with hearty repentance, and true faith, turn to God?" What is there, in the acceptance of such a penitent, to encourage hope, in hardened sinners, or in any whose repentance is not hearty, or whose faith is not sincere?

It seems to me that one might as well speak in the same manner respecting the parable of the man who "built his house on the sand" (in consequence of which it was destroyed by a flood), and of the other, who "founded his house on a rock."

Now every one would perceive the absurdity of saying, "one house stood firm, that none might despair; and one was washed away, that none might presume;" as if the different foundations on which they were built did not account for the difference of their fates.

There are, however, as I have said, many persons, who do not venture to express confidence as to the efficacy of a death-bed-repentance, who yet insist much on the importance, in all cases, of what is called, preparation for death; and who in their views on that subject do not avail themselves of the instruction they might derive from our Lord's own discourses.

One of the most important for the present purpose is the parable of the Ten Virgins; which therefore I propose to explain to you, and to comment on at some length in the concluding Lecture.

Note.—In the former editions I did not notice the strange notion (as to me it seems) of some Commentators, who represent the penitent malefactor as having at first joined his companion in reviling Jesus. But having since found that some sensible persons have hastily and inconsiderately adopted that notion, I have thought it worth while briefly to advert to it.

Those who have maintained this theory have done so for the sake of reconciling (as they suppose) Luke's account with those of Matthew and Mark, who use the plural number; speaking of Jesus being reviled by the malefactors who were crucified with Him.

This is one of the cases in which Commentators, for the sake of escaping some very small, or even imaginary difficulty, entangle themselves in a real, and great, and, indeed, insurmountable difficulty on the other side. With a view to reconcile the narrative of Luke with those of the other Evangelists, they made it irreconcilable with itself, and with all probability. For, the words of the penitent malefactor are—on this theory—such as no one so situated could have uttered; and our Lord's reply such as we may be sure He could not have made to such an address.

The supposed difficulty on the other side, is, that if *both* the fellow-sufferers with Jesus did not revile Him, there must be a slight inaccuracy in the narratives of Matthew and Mark; just such an inaccuracy as—humanly speaking—one might expect to find (as every day's experience shows) in a true narrative; and such as every one would allow to be of little or no consequence.

If some of those who heard Jesus reviled by a fellow-sufferer, either from error of memory reported this of the *men*, instead of *one* of them, or were, by mistake, so understood by the persons to whom they made their report, either of these would have been just such an inaccuracy as takes place every day in some narrative substantially true, and quite accurate in all important points, though not in some insignificant details.*

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* Indeed, in all the affairs of ordinary life, we find that the very characteristic of honest, independent testimony from several different witnesses, is, agreement and accuracy in all the important points, com-

The question then is, whether inspiration can reasonably be looked for in a case of this kind, to prevent any such historical inaccuracy.

I should say, certainly not. And looking to several other instances that may be found in the New Testament, we may plainly perceive that, in point of fact, the Sacred Writers were *not* supernaturally guarded against trifling inaccuracies in the detail of unimportant circumstances.

For instance, in Matthew's and in Luke's accounts of the temptations of our Lord in the wilderness, there is a difference in the *order* of them; the one placing *last* the temptation of the offer of "all the kingdoms of the world;" while the other places last the temptation to cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple. But both record, what is important, the temptations, and the resistance to them; the order in which they occurred, in which evidently one or the other Evangelist must have been inaccurate, was of little or no consequence.

Again, John the Evangelist records the Baptist's saying that he did not *know* Jesus (John i. 31) till he saw the appointed sign of the Holy Spirit descending and "abiding on Him;" (doubtless indicated by the appearance of the supernatural light—the glory of the Lord—or Shechinah, which is often alluded to in the Old Testament) while Matthew (with whom Mark and Luke agree) speaks of this appearance *after* the Baptism, though John the Baptist had before known Jesus, and hesitated to baptise Him. (Matt. iii. 14.) Now, if this appearance took place before the Baptism,

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bined with trifling discrepancies in insignificant details: insomuch that the absence of this, and a minute agreement in every trifling particular, generally suggests the idea of a made-up story, or of one writer carefully copying from another.

and not after, it is plain that Matthew must have transposed the order of events. If—which is more probable—it took place both before and after, the luminous appearance continuing till after the voice had come from heaven, then, Matthew must have omitted its *first* appearance. But the *important* circumstance—that it did take place, and was witnessed by the Baptist—is that in which all the Evangelists agree.

Again, Jesus is recorded by Luke (ch. xviii.) as healing a blind man as He was going *into* Jericho; and by two other Evangelists, the miracle (for one can hardly doubt it was the same) is recorded as taking place as He was going *out* of Jericho. And, moreover, *two* blind men are spoken of by Matthew (ch. xx.), and only one by the other Evangelists. And yet no sensible man can doubt, on reading the three narratives, that they all relate to one and the same transaction; though two out of the three who relate it must have been incorrect in some trifling point of detail. But as *nothing turns on* the circumstance of the miracles being performed as Jesus was entering, or as He was leaving, the town, or upon its being on one blind man, or on two, it was not, we may presume, thought needful to rectify by supernatural interference such a trifling inaccuracy.

Again, one of the Evangelists (Matt. viii.) represents the Centurion, whose servant was healed, as coming and speaking himself to Jesus; and another, Luke (ch. vii.), whose account is probably the more exact one, as speaking merely through his messengers. Here again, nothing turns on the difference between the Centurion coming himself, or sending. His faith, and the miracle which rewarded it, are the important points; and on these the Evangelists agree. An inspired correction of an insignificant mistake, in an unimportant circumstance, was apparently not deemed needful.

And several other instances of a similar kind may be

found.* The case before us is, doubtless, one of them. The apparent object of Matthew and Mark was to set forth the sufferings and indignities to which Jesus was exposed. Besides being betrayed by one of his Apostles, and deserted by the rest, and tortured and insulted by his executioners, and taunted by the spectators, He was also reviled by a fellow-sufferer. Whether by one, or by two, was a matter of as little consequence, in reference to the design of those two Evangelists, as the precise number of the bye-standers who insulted Him. And if, through a very natural mistake, they apprehended that to have been done by "malefactors," which was in reality done by one only, there seems no reason to expect, any more than in the other cases just above cited, that a supernatural interference should take place to rectify so unimportant an error.

But now consider the difficulties of the opposite explanation;—that which represents the penitent robber as having just before joined his companion in reviling Jesus.

It is hardly going too far to say that this hypothesis goes to destroy the whole character of the Gospel; since it represents a sinner of the most aggravated description as admitted to a pre-eminent degree of divine favour, *without repentance.* For he who is usually designated as "the *penitent* thief" would have been, on this supposition, most emphatically, the impenitent. He is represented as not expressing any contrition, nor even making any acknowledgment of

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* Some persons might, perhaps, reckon among these the different accounts given by each of the four Evangelists of Peter's three denials of his Lord. But in this view I cannot concur, for the reasons given in the Lecture on the Apostle Peter, ("Lectures on the Apostles,") in which I have proposed what appears to me a far more probable explanation.

a fault; but as rebuking, with unparalleled effrontery, his companion, for the fault which he himself had been just before committing in a far *more aggravated* form, (since *he* was convinced of our Lord's innocence,) and then, as applying to Him whom he had been thus reviling, not to be pardoned, but to be "remembered;" and he is thereupon welcomed as one admitted to an extraordinary degree of favour! If we can believe this, we must make all that is said in Scripture of repentance and christian humility and self-abasement, go for nothing!

I have said that this man's offence is represented by the theory in question, as far more aggravated than that of the other malefactor, whom he rebuked. For this latter partook, we must suppose, of the prejudice general among the Jews, who expected the Messiah to come with great temporal power to subdue all enemies; and, consequently, rejected Jesus as a blasphemous impostor because He did not do so. And when they saw Him actually crucified, their prejudice was of course confirmed. They exclaimed, "Let Christ the King of Israel come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe!" And in the same tone the impenitent malefactor exclaims, "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us!"

The other, on the contrary, testifies that "This man hath done nothing amiss." And to proclaim his *innocence*, (you should observe,) was, in this case, to proclaim his being *from God*. For He certainly had put forward that claim; and, therefore, if He were *not guilty* of the charge on which He was condemned, of being an impious pretender, He must have been really the Christ.* Such, therefore, the penitent malefactor ac-

* There is every appearance of Pilate's being either convinced, or, at least, strongly inclined to believe, that Jesus was the Messiah. And he seems to have "sought

knowledged Him to be. And of this he must have been convinced *before* the crucifixion; nothing having since occurred to convince any one who had before disbelieved it. He is represented, therefore, (on the theory I have been examining,) as doing what I conceive neither he nor any one else ever did or could do; as reviling Him whom he *knew* to be the innocent and, therefore, the chosen servant of God: and afterwards, without expressing any remorse for this, as rebuking another for a fault which, however great, was incalculably short of his own!

Will it be said that, perhaps, he did express remorse, and ask, and obtain, pardon, but that all this is omitted in Luke's narrative? This would be to impute to the Evangelist a most grave falsification of history. It is to represent him as wholly suppressing a most important circumstance, on which the whole character of the entire transaction depends, and thus, altogether misleading his readers. And such a suppression would be an incomparably greater fault than the erroneous insertion of some trifling and wholly unimportant circumstance. For instance, what would have been thought of this very historian if he had mentioned—as he does—Paul's cruel persecution of the Christians, and also his being a highly-favoured servant of God, but had *omitted* all mention of his *conversion?* Now just such, and not at all more justifiable, would have been such an omission as that above supposed.

It will be plain then, I think, on reflection, that the difficulties of the explanation we have been considering

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to release Him," not from a mere reluctance to condemn an innocent man, (which a person of Pilate's character would not have much regarded,) but rather from an expectation that He would shortly put forth His miraculous powers, and reward those who should have taken his part, and signally punish his enemies.

are insuperable. It is incredible (as was observed in the Lecture) that this man could have addressed Jesus in the manner he did, if he had not been already well known to Him, and a believer, and an accepted disciple. It is incredible that, being such, he should have reviled Him. It is incredible that, if he *had* done so, he could have thought of rebuking his companion for a fault which he himself had been committing in a far more aggravated degree. And it is incredible that he should express no remorse, nor ask, nor obtain, any pardon, and yet should be an object of extraordinary favour. And it is incredible that, if he *had* asked and obtained pardon, Luke should have suppressed so important a part of the transaction.

On the other hand, supposing Luke's narrative to be correct and complete, we have only to attribute to Matthew and Mark one of those trifling inaccuracies as to an insignificant circumstance, which, as we have seen in other instances, do occur in the Gospel-history, and which it was not thought needful to guard against by a special inspiration.

But, in this instance, as in some others, (one of which is noticed in the Lecture on the Apostle Peter, before alluded to,) some commentators, in their anxiety to avoid some imaginary difficulty, entangle themselves in an inextricable net of difficulties of their own making.

LECTURE XII.

Preparation for Death.

I PROCEED to make some observations on the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins, which is particularly well-suited, and I think must have been designed, to prevent such mistakes as commonly prevail, respecting a Christian's preparation for death.

I will set before you our Lord's parable, together with the passage immediately before it, which unluckily is placed in another chapter (Matthew xxiv.), though it is not only a part of the same discourse, but is particularly connected with this parable. The divisions into chapters and verses ofter obscure the sense of Scripture to those who do not know, or do not recollect, that these divisions were not made

or thought of by the Sacred Writers, but were added long after their time.

Matthew xxiv. 42.* "Watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But be assured of this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken open. Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour when ye think not, the Son of Man cometh. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his Master hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Master, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant say in his heart, My Master delayeth his coming; and begin to beat his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Master of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the

* See Note in the preceding Lecture, p. 341.

hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Chap. xxv. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out.* But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in to him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Master, master, open to us. But

* This is the marginal reading in our Bibles.

he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

Now in order to take in the full force of this most awfully-important parable, you should recollect that the *marriage*-feasts among the Jews were among their richest and most splendid festivals; in which they delighted to display the utmost magnificence, and the most imposing solemnity. And the same custom is said by travellers to prevail in those regions of the East, even to this day. The savings of many years, it is said, are often reserved expressly to be laid out on such an occasion, on which they spare no expense that comes within the compass of their means, and vie with each other in the multitude of guests invited, and in the pomp and costliness of the entertainment. It was at a wedding, accordingly, in Cana of Galilee, that our Lord thought fit (on account of the concourse of people whom such a festival was sure to draw together) to make the first display of his miraculous power, and thus, publicly, to open his ministry.

And as these splendid solemnities were, of course, very striking, and likely to make a strong impression on all who witnessed them, He, for that reason, more than once illustrates some circumstance relating to his religion, by some allusion to the well-known ceremonies of a marriage-feast.

On the occasion now before us He alludes to that part of the accustomed solemnity which consisted in receiving the bridegroom, on his triumphant arrival at his own house, with music, and a great assemblage of attendants, bearing torches and lamps (their marriages being always celebrated at night), to lead the way to the feast prepared.

The virgins, of whom our Lord speaks, are to be understood as the attendants appointed to wait for, and to receive the bridal party, and to conduct them to the wedding-feast. Of these virgins, He tells us, five were wise, and five foolish; and the foolish ones, neglecting to bring oil with them, found themselves at a loss when their master's coming was announced; and while they were gone to

buy oil, the door was shut against them.*

The same precept as that which is inculcated in this parable, He had enforced, in the passage immediately preceding it (which I have just set before you), by the illustration of a master of a house which was broken open, because he did not watch; which, of course, he would have done, if he had known at what hour the thief would come.

The application of the parable is sufficiently plain, and is distinctly made by our Lord himself; who, in both instances, repeats the precept, "Watch, therefore—be ye also ready—for ye know not in what hour your Lord doth come;" to explain, and to impress on the minds of the hearers, that He has in view the case of his disciples, that is, of all Christians, who are exhorted to hold themselves prepared for their Lord's coming, that whenever *that* may take place, He may find them occupied in doing his will, and discharging the duties of faithful and

* For some further remarks on this parable, see Note at the end of the Lecture.

diligent servants. "Blessed," says He, "is that servant whom his lord when he cometh, shall find so doing." And on the other hand He denounces a most fearful judgment on those who shall be taken unawares,—who shall be found to have neglected their duty, and not prepared for his coming. And that He is addressing his precepts not to his disciples then present only, but "even unto all," we have his own express assurance, "What I say unto you, I say unto *all;* Watch."

Now to any one of you who believes what Jesus Christ has said, and expects that He will do as He has promised, it is a most interesting inquiry whether you yourself are likely to inherit the blessing or the curse here held out;—whether you are to consider yourself as represented by the wise or by the foolish virgins. It is your business, not indeed to pronounce on the acceptance or condemnation of your neighbour, but carefully to look to your own ways, and strive to secure your own salvation.

In order then to make this inquiry the easier, I will endeavour to explain to

you, first, what is meant by our Lord's "coming," for which we are to prepare; 2dly, *how* we are to prepare for it; and, 3dly, *when* we are to prepare.

By our Lord's "coming," is plainly meant (as far, that is, as the parable applies to Christians generally) his coming to judge the world at the Last Day. But you are to observe that though there is no precise time fixed (so as for us to know it) for the general judgment of all men, both of those who shall then be living, and of those who shall have died, either lately, or long before, in all Ages of the world; yet, practically, to each particular person, the time of his own *death* is the time of his Lord's coming.

Those who shall have died at times the most distant from each other, some a thousand years ago, and some yesterday, and some perhaps many years hence, all agree in this, that their respective times of trial come to an end at their respective deaths; and, therefore, whether the interval of time be long or short between any one's death and the Day of Judgment, is a circumstance that makes no difference

in this point of view; since his doom, on that day, is to depend on the life he has led in this world. As to what the state of the departed is during that interval, we know little or nothing; since the Scriptures say little on the subject; and our own reason, as I pointed out to you in the foregoing Lectures, can furnish us with but faint conjectures. But thus far we do know most assuredly, what that state is *not;* namely, that it is not a state of *trial;* since nothing can be plainer than the declarations of Scripture, that our sentence at the Day of Judgment depends on our conduct in this present life. I say then, that, practically, the coming of Christ to judgment is at the close of our life on earth.

Our next point is to consider *in what manner* it is that we are required to prepare for death. The answer seems abundantly plain from Scripture, that it is by diligently devoting ourselves to Christ's service; by giving ourselves up to be "led by the Spirit" of Christ, which "if any man have not, he is none of his;" by acting with a constant re-

ference to his will; by seeking every opportunity of testifying our love, and gratitude, and reverence for Him, our faith in Him, and our hope of his promises; even as a faithful and affectionately attached servant zealously studies to show his obedience to his master, and care for his service. And even thus does our Lord himself illustrate the Christian's duty, in the exhortation He gives his disciples; "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh they may open unto him immediately: blessed are those servants, whom their lord, when he cometh, shall find watching."

Now this being the *manner* in which we are required to prepare for death,

The third point proposed, namely, the time *when* we are to prepare, seems to be settled along with the foregoing: for it is manifest that the *whole of our life* is the very time appointed for this purpose,—being the period of trial allotted to us,

to prove whether we will thus diligently comply with our Lord's commands or not.

But, if this be the case, which you may plainly see it must be, if there be truth in God's Word, how great must be the mistake of those who speak of preparing for death as a distinct and separate business, proper to be undertaken when we believe death to be just at hand; and who of course think it unnecessary, till that time comes, and while they are in the enjoyment of youth and health, and have no particular reason to suppose their life near an end! whereas our Lord plainly tells you, that this is not only a proper time, but is just *the very time* (the *only* time, as far as He has thought fit to reveal to us) for making such a preparation; saying, "Watch, therefore; for ye *know not* at what hour your Lord cometh."

There are many, I am well aware, who do not like to think about death; and would, therefore, willingly put off such uncomfortable thoughts till the occasion calls for them. In the case of those who

are leading a christian life, I have done my best, in the foregoing Lectures, to lessen the gloomy feelings accompanying the thought of death, by endeavouring to excite an interest in the things of the next world, and presenting a less cheerless idea of that world than many have done. But as for those of a different character,—who know, or who suspect, that they are not living as they will wish to have lived when they come to die, I am setting before these the right method to deprive death of its terrors. And I entreat them to remember that death is neither the less certain, nor the further off, for their not chusing to think about it; and if the occasion for thinking about it, and preparing for it, be (as I trust I have clearly explained to you) *now*, while they are in the full enjoyment of life and health and youth, it is surely better to think of it while the thought may be productive of some benefit, than when it can produce only unavailing regret. *When* we shall die, does not depend upon ourselves; but *how* we shall die, does; since it depends on how we shall have lived.

When I object to the use of the phrase "preparing for death," as denoting something that is to be done when we believe death to be approaching, I allude (as was observed in the last Lecture), not merely to those who indulge in a careless and irreligious life, and who think it will be time enough to repent on their death-bed, but also to many sincere Christians;—to many, who are far from thinking that old age or sickness is the only proper time to think of the next world, but who still think that there is a certain preparation for death requisite, over and above the leading of a christian life (or what they regard as such) during the time of their health and security; and that it is a most important thing to have warning given them of their approaching end, some time before-hand, that they may have leisure allowed them to make their peace with God. And they are, I believe, confirmed in this notion by the prayer in the Litany against "sudden death;" which they consider as implying that it is a great evil to be called away without having any previous warning. And this is likely to

be a source of great disquiet; since no one can be sure that his prayers against sudden death (in this sense of the word) will be heard; seeing that both good and bad are often cut off without previous notice.

All these notions are founded in mistake; and if any one, who is leading a christian life, is distressed by any anxieties on this head, he may find a cure for them in the right interpretation of Scripture. It is indeed in any one's power to secure himself against the possibility of *sudden* death; at least of *such* sudden death as the Christian should pray to be delivered from. For sudden death, in that sense, means *unprepared* death; and if any man will but live during the period of his youth, and health, and security, with that constant watchfulness which our Lord exhorts us to, he will always be prepared for his coming.

This indeed the greater part would be willing to admit. Most men would not doubt, that a man who is, while in a state of ordinary health and security, constantly leading a life of christian watchfulness, is well prepared for death. But what is not

so generally understood, is that *no one else* is well prepared;—that death not only cannot be frightfully sudden to the constantly-watchful Christian, but cannot fail to be sudden to all who have *not* been thus watchful, however long a notice they may afterwards have; since (as our Lord expressly teaches us) the time appointed by Him for making that preparation is, not *after*, but *before* we have received the warning; *before*, not *after* his coming is announced.

Look but at the passage now before us. When the bridegroom's coming was announced, the foolish virgins, as well as the wise, bethought themselves of preparing to receive him; they then asked for oil to supply their lamps; and finding that the others had none to spare, they went out at once to buy some. You observe, they are quite in earnest now;—as soon as ever they have warning of the bridegroom's near approach, they are all diligence to get themselves ready to meet him; but their diligence comes too late; they find, on returning, that the door is shut against them, and they are disowned.

They ought to have thought of these things sooner, and brought oil with them. The time for making preparation was, not after, but *before* they had received the warning.

In setting before men the danger of trusting to a death-bed repentance, it is not uncommon for preachers to urge strongly the uncertainty of life, and the probability of being hurried out of the world suddenly, by some disease or accident, without having time to repent. And these exhortations, I believe, generally fail of their effect, from the disposition men have to trust in their own good fortune, and to flatter themselves, each one for himself, that *he* shall be exempt from such sudden seizures of disease,—such fatal accidents; and that he *shall* have time to repent. My reason, however, for abstaining from such topics, is, that I conceive they are *nothing to the purpose.* I cannot bring myself to think it either certain or very probable (at least Scripture affords me no ground for it) that it makes any difference with respect to a man's salvation, whether he be struck dead by a flash

of lightning, or die of a lingering and incurable disease. *Sudden* death (in the sense in which it is to be prayed against and dreaded), sudden death must be, as I have explained to you, unprepared death; and since it plainly appears from our Lord's own words that the time for *preparing* is the time of our health and security, when we have no distinct warning of its immediate approach, it follows inevitably, that he who does thus employ that time,—he, in short, who is a sincere Christian, never *can* die suddenly; and that he who lives otherwise, necessarily *must* die suddenly.

I do not of course mean that every man, or that most men, must belong altogether to the one or the other of these two descriptions. A great number of persons will be between the two. But I mean that *as far as* any man is leading a christian life, so far he is preparing for the next world, and has no ground, from Scripture or reason, for apprehending sudden death, in any such sense as would make it an *evil;* and that *as far as* a man is leading an unchristian life up to the

time when he receives notice of death's being at hand, so far, his death, according to the representation of Scripture, is to be accounted, practically, sudden, notwithstanding that notice: in short, that each man's death is more or less sudden, not according as he has had longer or shorter warning of its approach, but according to the life he has been leading previously to that warning. Both reason and Scripture teach us to believe that our appointed trial on earth (at least the far greater part of it, and the only part of it that is at all noticed in Scripture) consists in the experiment how we shall conduct ourselves with the knowledge that we certainly shall die, but without the knowledge *when*. Now, if this be the case, it follows inevitably, that this our trial is at an end, as soon as ever this uncertainty is at an end; that is, as soon as ever we do know that our death approaches. At any rate our trial must then become one of a totally different kind; of a kind which the Scriptures, as I have just said, do not mention at all, except to warn us of the danger of placing our hopes on it.

It may be said, by any one who is disposed to raise captious and cavilling questions,—"When is a man said to die suddenly? and when, to have warning of the approach of death? Do you mean an hour's warning, or a day, or a week, or a month, or a year? And again, what degree of certain assurance of approaching death must a man have, to constitute a warning? Every one is morally certain that he must die within a hundred years; and no one can be certain that he shall not die within an hour: where, then, do you draw the line between sudden death, and death with warning? or must you not admit that the difference between the two is only a difference in degree, not in kind;—that it is merely, that one man has more precise and longer notice than another?"

On the same principle it might be asked, when a man is to be called *old*, and where you will draw the line? whether a man is to be called old at sixty and not at fifty-nine; or at fifty-nine and not at fifty-eight; and so on. And on such a principle, the phrases which have

been always in use, in all countries, of a man's being "at the point of death"—of his "life being in danger"—of his "dying suddenly," &c., &c., would have absolutely no meaning at all, because we are unable in such cases to draw an exact line.

But such quibbling subtleties are hardly worth serious attention. Every one is practically aware that there is such a thing as sudden death, though one may be *more* sudden than another, and though the gradations are infinite: and every one understands that there is a meaning in the expression of "being about to die," although in a certain sense, every one is about to die, and though it may be impossible to draw a precise line as to the cases which ought or ought not to be so described. The difference between the situation of a man who thinks it probable (though no one can be certain) that he may live a good many years, and of one who fully believes that he has but a few hours, or days, to live, is, as far as *the feelings of the parties are concerned*, a difference in kind, and a very great and

important one. Indeed, one may often find that the very same person, who, in the one of these situations, thought little or nothing of the next world, or thought of it only as something for which he might prepare himself at a future time, will, in the other situation, be indifferent to all the concerns of this world, and engrossed with the thought of the next, and anxious to set about immediately the great work of repentance.

If you inquire of the Scriptures concerning the possible acceptance of a death-bed repentance, you find nothing promised to it;—nothing indeed that compels us to despair; but nothing that encourages us to feel confidence. Far be it from us to limit God's mercy to that which He has expressly promised; but far be from us also the presumption of promising where He has not. "That which is impossible with men, is possible with God;" but to disregard our Lord's solemn warnings, and neglect his gracious offers, on the ground that it is possible for Him to save you notwithstanding, is to mock Him, and to trifle with your own soul.*

* See Note at the end of the Lecture.

Should you think it safe for a man to resist all the evidence for the truth of the Christian religion,—to blaspheme its Author, and to persecute his followers, on the ground that not only such a man *may* be miraculously converted, but that this was actually the case of the Apostle Paul? God did for him more than He ever *covenanted* to do for any one: would it not be the height of rashness for any one to calculate on any thing of this kind for himself?

Let no one then, in any case, fear God's doing *less*, or calculate on his doing *more*, than He has promised. Let no one either torture himself with fears of a death without any distinct warning, or rest his hopes on his having such warning. Such hopes, if not necessarily vain, are, at the best, presumptuous and unwarranted.

There is a notion again entertained by some, that religious sentiments and christian faith adopted just at the last moment, though they may not wipe off the guilt of past transgressions, will sanctify, as it were, all the good deeds of a man's past life, though these may have sprung

from no christian principle. If, for instance, any one has been chaste and honest, for the sake of a good reputation —temperate, for the sake of health,— bountiful and obliging, with a view to human applause, &c., and has acted throughout from such motives, without any thought of pleasing God, and without any reference to christian principles, they imagine that if, on his death-bed, he adopts these principles, and throws himself on the Redeemer's mercy, his past good actions will be accepted as if they had been performed from a religious motive. But nothing can be more contrary to the whole spirit of Christianity than this notion. Whatever favour any one may obtain, this we may be sure of, that his actions are all estimated according to the motives they are coming from. Of the Pharisees who prayed and gave alms (which are in themselves good actions) that they "might be seen of men," our Lord emphatically declares, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." No subsequent faith can give a christian character to actions not performed on chris-

tian principles. A sense of religion on the death-bed, whatever else it may effect, cannot possibly reverse the past: it can no more make that a christian virtue which was not so at the time when it was practised, than it can make that duty to have been done which was omitted, or that act to have been not done which was done.

It is an awful and a painful thought, that so many, who are not without a sense of religion, should reserve the chief part of the care of their souls till the time expressly and especially appointed for that care, is over;—should begin to think of their state of trial, and to prepare for death, when the season which Scripture allots for that trial, and for that preparation, is at an end;—when (as from our Lord's parable, we have but too much reason to fear) THE DOOR IS SHUT! Christ's ministers, however, are bound to describe things not as we may wish them to be, but as the Scriptures tell us they really are. To disguise the truth, could only lull you into a false security;—to declare it, as our Lord Himself has declared it,

may lead you, through his grace, to consider it and lay it to heart, in the time which our Lord marks out to us as that which He has appointed for making our preparation. And this time He represents to us as that which is *before* we have received distinct warning of approaching death; saying, "Be ye ready, *for ye know not* at what hour your Lord cometh," &c.

In truth, however, nothing can appear more fair and reasonable than the system which our Lord declares He will pursue. If two men have both been equally leading a christian life, and have both devoted themselves to Christ's service while they were in health and security, there is no reason (at least that we can perceive) why, if one of them be cut off by a sudden accident, it should be imputed to him as a fault, that he was not particularly occupied with the thought of death an hour before it happened; or why he should fare worse at the Day of Judgment than the other, supposing that other to have warning given him, by a long illness, of his approaching end. The death of each was such as God appointed, and did not

depend on themselves; and it is to be concluded that if they had changed places, each would have acted as the other did.

On the other hand, if two persons have each been leading an equally careless or wicked life, and one dies unexpectedly, and the other has warning, and is struck with terror and remorse when he perceives his end approaching, is there any ground for expecting that any difference will be made between these? These also, it is probable, would have changed conduct with each other, had they changed conditions; nor is either of them the better or the worse for having received, or not received, a precise warning of the approach of death. The general warning, to be *always ready*, they had both alike neglected: in the trial how they would behave themselves, under the certainty of dying, and the uncertainty *when*, they have both alike failed. One has not shown more vigilance than the other; we can show no reason, therefore, for making any difference between them.

I do not mean that we could be author-

ised to draw any conclusions as to God's dealings with man, from our own notions of what is probable and reasonable. God forbid we should build our belief on any such conjectures. It is from Scripture-revelations alone that we can know on what principles we shall be judged. But in the present case, we are taught by our Lord Himself, what we are to hope, and what to fear. He assures his faithful servants who are occupied in their duty, that they need not fear his coming, however unexpected; "if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, blessed is that servant;" and on the other hand, He warns us, in the parable of the virgins, of the danger of trusting to any preparations to be made after we shall have received notice of his being at hand. Now if all this had been ever so much at variance with what might have been expected as probable, still we should have had no right to doubt what God has revealed, or to murmur at what He has decreed. But in this case, all ground for complaint or wonder, is the more completely removed, when we find

the representations of Scripture to be such as we should most naturally have been led to expect.

And for this reason perhaps it is that our Lord illustrates what He says on this point, by such parables as are taken from the most common and familiar transactions of men; such as that of the attendants at the wedding-feast, and of the servants left in charge of their master's house; as if to call our attention to the circumstance that the principles according to which *his* promises and warnings are held out, are the very same as those on which every one of *us* acts in his own concerns. If any of you found, on returning unexpectedly home, that the servants, whom he had entrusted with his business and his property, had been wasteful and negligent, because they did not think of their master's coming, you would justly condemn those servants; and if one of them had received, a few hours before, private notice of his master's approach, and, though he had hitherto behaved as ill as the rest, should endeavour, just at last, to save appearances, and to set him-

self about the business which he ought to have been engaged in all along, you would (if you knew this) not regard him as more excusable than the others, since they would all have done the same had they received the same notice. You would tell him, that if his fidelity and zeal had been real, they would have been shown before he had any warning of his master's approach, instead of being put on for the occasion; you would, in short, "appoint him his portion with the hypocrites," as our Lord declares He will do to such servants as neglect his commands when they suppose his coming not to be near at hand. (Matt. xxiv. 48, 51.) And in the parable of the virgins, which immediately follows, He warns us that such a servant must not calculate on repairing his past neglect by beginning to exert himself when he has had notice of his Lord's immediate approach. No one, He gives us to understand, can claim credit for the care and vigilance he may show, after he has had notice of the danger being just at hand; because *every one* is careful then. "If the master of the house had known what

hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also." And "the foolish virgins" in like manner, were thoughtful and alert, when the coming of the bridegroom was announced; but they then found the door shut against them.

I remarked, in the last Lecture, that the friends of a sick man, who is likely to die, often consider it a duty of the highest importance to give him notice of his situation, if he is supposed not to be aware of his danger: I mean, even when there are no worldly affairs for him to settle; but merely with a view to afford him as much time as possible to prepare for death.

Now it is plain from what has been just said, that the giving of this notice, instead of lengthening, does, in fact, shorten his time for preparation. For since it has been shown that, according to the representations of Scripture, the appointed time for preparing—at least, for the chief part of our preparation—is while we have *no* warning of the immediate approach of

death; our trial on earth being (as far as is revealed to us) *how we shall behave in a state of uncertainty as to the time* of our death,—it follows plainly that a man's trial is at an end (at least that particular kind of trial on which, we have every reason to suppose, our final doom chiefly depends) as soon as that uncertainty is at an end. The warning given,—the knowledge conveyed to the man of his approaching death, by putting an end to his uncertainty, *shortens*, by just so much, that trial which is appointed to be made in a state of uncertainty. And the case of a man whose life had hitherto been irreligious or careless, which is just the one in which most persons would be particularly anxious to warn him of the approach of death, is the very case in which I should be most desirous to keep back such warning. I should be aiming, though by contrary means, at the very same end as they; namely, to give him as much time as possible for repentance. I should therefore be especially anxious to bring him to a right sense of religion *before* he was aware that his life was

drawing to a close. For his repentance would *then* be of quite a different character, and, one may hope, might be the more likely to be accepted, when it was not extorted by the mere dread of approaching death, and when it was accompanied with an earnest resolution immediately to amend his life, and to devote to God the remainder of it; which he himself might expect to be, possibly, many years. This at least would be far different from that sort of resolution (though properly speaking, it is rather a *wish* than a resolution) which many a one makes on his death-bed, to reform his life *if* it should be spared; though he had not entered on any such reform till he found that his life would most likely *not* be spared. It is true, in the case supposed just above, *we* are sure that the sick man has but a few days or hours to live; but since *he* (we are supposing) does not know but that he may live many years, his good thoughts, and resolutions, and efforts are not the less commendable; which they would be, if he knew his situation. His life, it is true, is not *actually* lengthened; he will not have,

in fact, any opportunity of "bringing forth fruits meet for repentance;" but so long as he is not himself aware of this, there is something of virtue even in virtuous [illegible] and resolutions; and we may cherish a hope that they may be accepted as "fruits" (though imperfect fruits) "meet for repentance."

And if I found that a person whom I believed to be dying, was unmoved by such arguments and exhortations as are applicable to men in general, but remained in a state of carelessness about his soul's welfare, I should next endeavour (for the reasons above mentioned) to rouse him, by announcing to him his being in *danger* of death, rather than by declaring the utter *hopelessness* of his recovery. And if this did not succeed,—if the knowledge of his being in danger of speedy death failed to excite him, there would be, I fear, little to be done in such a case.

Suppose now the case of a man in full health and security, who had been leading hitherto an unchristian life, coming to a sense of his sin, and resolving at once to

turn to God with all his heart from this time, and beginning immediately to reform whatever is amiss, and setting about to "strive to enter the strait gate;" and suppose him the very day after this cut off suddenly by some accident; and suppose again another man who had lived in the same irreligious state, up to the moment when he was struck with some disorder which he knew must carry him off in a month,—beginning then, and continuing during that interval, to profess penitence, to pray for pardon, to listen to the instructions of a minister, and the like; is it not quite plain, according to the view we have been taking, that though we have no right to pronounce positively concerning either of these persons, the former case affords incomparably better grounds for hope than the other? We cannot be sure, indeed, whether either of them would, in the event of his life being prolonged, have kept to his resolutions; but *he* surely was the more *likely* of the two to do so, whose good resolutions were not the effect of pressing terror, but were formed when he had a prospect of putting them into effect.

The repentance which has never appeared till called forth by immediate danger, it may be at least the more reasonably suspected, would soon have vanished away, if the danger had been removed. And yet I believe many persons would, while they shuddered at the awfully sudden death of the former of these men, be rather disposed to congratulate the other on having such ample time allowed him for preparation; because the repentance of the one has lasted a month, and that of the other only a day! As if the important point were the length of time that the religious feeling had lasted, rather than the character of that feeling, and the motives from which it sprung.

But no one would reason thus in his worldly affairs. Supposing a man's servants (to return to the comparison I lately employed) were, in his absence, neglecting their work, and wasting his goods; and one of them, being struck with remorse for his misconduct, should immediately discontinue all his evil practices, and set himself diligently to his proper employments; and suppose his

master should the very next hour unexpectedly come home, having a perfect knowledge of every particular of what had passed; he would surely judge more favourably of this servant, who had reformed his conduct while he supposed his master far away, than of another who had made a like reform, and set himself diligently to work, perhaps a whole day before; but who had done so, because he had had private notice of his master's coming. And yet *he* would have been behaving well for a day, and the other only for an hour. But every master would, in such a case, perceive that it is the motive that makes the difference.

Not that we are authorised to argue from our ways to God's ways, and to conclude that He must in every point deal with men as it would be reasonable for men to deal with each other. If Scripture had revealed to us that He will proceed on some quite different principles, it would have been for us to believe and submit; and if Scripture had been wholly silent on the subject, we could have gone no further than very faint and

doubtful conjectures, by reasoning from corresponding human transactions. But as it is, the Scriptures not only do not forbid, but even lead us to conclude that in our repentance,—our vigilance,—our good actions,—our prayers,—in short, in the whole of our behaviour, it is the hearty sincerity of the *motive*, that will be chiefly looked to. You will understand, therefore, what I have been saying, not as an *argument*, to prove what course we ought to pursue, but as an illustration of what Scripture teaches on this point.

Now as the Word of God teaches us that sincerity is necessary to our acceptance with Him, and as the best proof of sincerity in repentance is the actual "bringing forth of fruits meet for repentance,"—a man's actually reforming his life, and devoting it thenceforward to God,—so, the next best proof is, if, while he expects his life to be prolonged, he fully and honestly *designs* such a reformation; "steadfastly *purposing* to lead a new life," and immediately and earnestly *setting about it;* even though it so happen that he is shortly after cut off by unexpected

death, before he could put his good resolutions into practice. But one who fully believes himself to be dying, cannot properly be said to "*intend* to lead a new life." He may *wish* that he had done so, and may be fully convinced that he should do so, if he could be delivered from his present situation; but he cannot be properly said to *design* anything that he believes to be out of his power; and what is more, he cannot himself be sure that if he were not in this immediate danger he might not feel very differently.

I am not saying, you will observe, that there is no hope for this last kind of repentance: but it is plainly very different from the other man's; and though if any one were so situated, I should exhort him to such repentance, as the only thing that remains for *him*, I should not presume to hold out confident promises where the Scriptures do not.

But, it may be said, if a man should chance to have warning of the near approach of death, should he make no use of it? Is there not some preparation suitable at such a time, even to the best

Christian? Or should he act and feel as if he had no particular expectation of speedy death? Doubtless a man should think and act in a manner suitable to the occasion; because he should *always* think and act in a manner suitable to *every* occasion: only, let not the feelings and behaviour of a sincere Christian at such a time, be called preparation for death;—at least not in the sense in which that phrase is commonly used, which is to signify, in fact, preparation for *another life*. In this sense a death-bed is not the time for a preparation for *death*, but only for a preparation for the *act of dying*. Such an one *has* been preparing for death all through his life. He does not consider his death-bed as the proper time for thinking of "working out his salvation," when "the night cometh, in which no man can work;"—he does not think *that* a proper time for resolving to forsake the sins and vanities of the world, when the sins and vanities of the world are forsaking him;—he does not wait till then for setting about to amend his future life, when there is no future to amend;—for

sowing the seed,—just as the harvest is beginning. But when he perceives death to be near at hand, he will bring all his worldly business to a close, and prepare his friends for parting with him: if he is about setting out on a journey or engaging in any work, or learning any art, science, or language, he will desist from his purpose: and he will pray,—not, then for the first time,—but because he has been accustomed to call on God on every emergency,—he will pray that the same Holy Spirit which has supported him hitherto in all the trials of life, may support him in this last trial, and enable him to close life with resignation. And he will thank his Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, not for the first time, but for the last in this world, for all the blessings he has received through life, and far more for those beyond it. In short, he will "arise and trim his lamp;" but he will not have *then* to "seek for oil."

It is natural for any one, as he feels his end approaching, to endeavour to recommend himself to God by penitence, and prayer, and mental forgiveness,—

and by striving to wean himself from worldly thoughts, and become heavenly-minded: and if any one so situated were to ask me whether such devotional exercises are suitable to his condition, and well-timed, I should certainly answer that they are; not however merely because they are *natural;* but because there is no fear of any one's becoming, at *any* time, too pious and heavenly-minded; and because at such a time (supposing him to have fulfilled the duty of settling his worldly affairs), there is no other occupation so becoming that condition. But I have said that I should not recommend this merely as what we are *naturally* prompted to, because I fear it is also natural—that is, agreeable to the frail and self-deceiving heart of Man—to *postpone* during the hours of health and security, our endeavours after christian holiness, and to trust to what may be done just at the close of life. To the dying man, the present is the *best* time for those endeavours, merely because it is the *only* time left him: to the man in health again, the present is the best time; not only be-

cause he cannot be sure of any other, but still more, from the very circumstance of his having no immediate expectation of death: since the Scriptures direct us to provide oil before we have notice of the bridegroom's approach, and warn us to "be ready, because we *know not* at what hour our Lord cometh." If the dying man have not, as is so often the case, his understanding weakened or confused by bodily disease, still he cannot prove, even to himself, the hearty earnestness of his penitence, and devotion, by entering on, and persevering in, an improved life. There is nothing inconsistent therefore in saying that though such endeavours are the most *suitable occupation* for the death-bed, yet the death-bed is the least *suitable time* for them; except to him who has no alternative: and that though it may be never too late to turn to God, yet it is always too late to think of deferring it.

Consider then, I entreat you, how you would feel at this moment, if sentence were passed on you of death, within a day or two; and reflect how earnestly you would then strive (supposing you

could keep your thoughts sufficiently collected) to turn to God with all your heart, and fit yourself for appearing before Him; and how earnestly you would wish, and how vainly, to recall some of the past opportunities, such as perhaps you are at this moment neglecting. I do not say, act now as you think you *would*, if you were sure of dying in a few days; for in many points that might be utterly improper; but act as you think you would *wish*, on the approach of death to *have* acted now. It will then be too late to wish for the moment which is now present; and if you neglect this, and look forward to what is to be done when "the bridegroom knocks," you affront his long-suffering, and grieve his Holy Spirit. The fig-tree is yet standing; and is left, to try, whether cultivation will bring it to fruitfulness, before the sentence is passed of "cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

It is a melancholy task, for us the ministers of the Gospel, to be so often applied to, on the approach of death, by those, who have not prepared for the great

change during their lives; whose seed-time has been delayed till harvest, and who flatter themselves that there will be a saving efficacy in our speaking and reading to them, and praying over them, and interceding for them on their death-bed. "Give us of your oil" (they seem to say), "for our lamps are going out."

And one circumstance which often makes the attendance of a minister in a sick-room the more distressing to him is, that he is sometimes even blamed as hard-hearted and *unfeeling*, if he refuse to hold out a confident hope of the dying man's acceptance with God, in a case where he perhaps can find nothing in Scripture to warrant such confidence. He is blamed for not presuming to take on himself the office of the Almighty; for "who can forgive sins but God only?" And how can his ministers dare to pronounce that He has pardoned and accepted any one, except where his written Word affords ground for believing it? And yet if some ignorant and presumptuous fanatic chance to be present, and boldly declare that the dying man will

undoubtedly be saved, such a person is usually considered as more kind-hearted and compassionate; as if the other did not *wish* the sinner to be saved, and would not save him if he could! Surely it would be thought unreasonable to tax with unkindness an experienced physician, who pronounced his patient to be in great danger; as if he wished him to die; and to attribute greater *humanity* to an ignorant quack, who should confidently promise recovery. I believe, indeed, such cases as this which I have just alluded to by way of illustration, do sometimes occur; but there is this difference in them from the other case; if the patient dies, after his recovery has been boldly warranted, the rashness and ignorance of the pretender who made the promise are *exposed;* every one sees the result. But groundless confidence, in the other case, remains unknown till the great Day of Judgment. False hopes, and false fears, are alike hidden by the grave; and hence it may be supposed many are the less cautious about making such promises, because their rashness can never be detected.

Some, I fear, are even tempted by this circumstance, and by the desire of being thought good-natured, and by a really humane wish to soothe at least the last hours of a dying man, whose terrors could produce no good effect in him, because they would come too late,—some, I say, are tempted in this way, into holding out delusive hopes even against their own judgment, and when they themselves believe them to be delusive. And sometimes, it is to be feared, they consent to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to one whom they perceive to be totally unfit to partake of it, from being (in the way I described in the last Lecture) totally mistaken as to the whole nature and design of the Ordinance,—unrepentant of the sin of having hitherto neglected it,—and full of a superstitious trust that it will operate as a kind of magical charm to ensure the salvation of any one who receives it just before his death.

They plead perhaps that it is a *harmless* deceit; which gives a little present comfort, where nothing else can be done. A real lover of truth, however, would not

resort to deceit, even if he thought that in this or that case it did no harm. But in fact it hardly ever is the case that any deceit is harmless. It is not harmless to him who practises it; for when he has once become familiar with falsehood in slighter cases, he will gradually learn to depart from truth in weightier matters. And it is not harmless to others; for though the dying man himself may be in such a state that nothing can harm or benefit *him*, his surviving friends may be, and I fear often are, encouraged to go on in a course of sin or of carelessness, by seeing one who has so lived, departing in triumphant confidence of salvation, with a positive assurance from some one who professes to be a Minister of the Gospel, that he is accepted with God. What can be more natural than that *they* also should listen to the delusions of Satan, who whispers to them, as to our first parents, "ye shall not surely die;" — that *they* should wait for a death-bed repentance, and propose to themselves, when the time shall arrive, to send for the same Minister who has spoken such words of comfort?

We have indeed no right,—and God

knows we have no wish,—to set bounds to the divine mercy, and to pronounce that a dying repentance, even of the most hardened sinner, is certainly unavailing. And we should say that *for the dying man*, the death-bed is the best time for seeking to make his peace with God; simply, because *he* has no other: for any one else, we should say that it is the very *worst;* because such repentance is the only kind whose sincerity cannot be proved, to himself or to others, by yielding fruits; and because it is the only kind to which Scripture makes no promises; and to which, consequently, *we* have no right to make any.

If we were disposed to magnify our office, we should, like the corrupt priests of superstitious churches, pretend to be able to ensure any one's salvation by our mediation, and by the superstitious ceremonies of their extreme unction, and by singing masses after his death for the repose of his soul. God knows, they do too often procure the repose of the soul! But it is *only in this life.* By holding out the hope of these helps and preservatives to be applied at the point of death, and

after death, they lull the sinner, during the time of his health and strength, into a false and fatal security; they quiet for the present the upbraiding of conscience, which would now rouse him by its goads, to know "the things that belong unto his peace, before they are hid from his eyes," but which will hereafter be changed into vain remorse and despair. They administer a deadly opiate, which relieves immediate pain, and lets the disease gain ground unresisted.

At the same time, while they administer groundless comfort to some, they cause groundless disquiet to others; leaving the sincere but weak and timorous Christian to be tortured with dread lest he should die too suddenly to partake of (what they call), the last Offices of religion. Surely Ezekiel's description of the false prophets of his own day will apply but too well to these: "With lies ye have made the *heart of the righteous sad*, whom I have not made sad; and *strengthened the hands of the wicked*, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life." (Ezek. xiii. 22.)

But honest Ministers (be assured) who

"watch over your souls, as they that must *give an account*," and who are sensible what a fearful account it will be for those who shall have "loved the praise of men more than the praise of God," will always be more afraid of displeasing their Master, than of displeasing you;—more anxious for your eternal welfare, than for your present ease; and more ready to warn those in health and security, according to what the Scriptures teach and warrant, than to encourage presumptuous confidence in the dying, by pretending to be wise above that which is written. We are bound to speak "the truth as it is in Christ Jesus:" we are bound to confess that we have not oil "enough for you and for us;"* though we instruct you how to trim and to kindle those lamps that are well supplied. We warn you that the time to prepare for the Lord's coming, is *now*, and at every time when you least expect it; and we are ready to teach you *how* that preparation should be conducted.

* See Burnet on the Twenty-fourth Article "Of Works of Supererogation;" where he treats of the absurd pretence that the merit of one man's good works may be transferred to another.

But we can afford you no *substitute* for it at the hour of death; nor dare we "speak peace, when there is no peace."

"Be ye therefore ready;" that you may inherit the blessing promised to those faithful servants "whom their Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching." "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night. . . But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief... therefore let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch, and be sober." (1 Thessalonians, chap. v.)

Note.—Different interpretations have been given of that part of the parable which mentions that, while the bridegroom tarried, they all, the wise as well as the foolish, slumbered and slept; but it is not necessary to enter on any full discussion of the signification of this circumstance, because it is sufficiently plain for our present purpose, what it does *not* mean. It cannot mean that Christians are authorised or encouraged to *sleep* in respect of their spiritual concerns;—to be slothful and careless in the business of working out their salvation, till the moment when they are summoned to meet their Lord: it cannot mean that as the wise virgins provided themselves with oil and then resigned themselves to repose, so we are to provide ourselves, as it were, with a certain stock of christian faith and good works, and may then think we have done enough, and give ourselves up safely to spiritual indolence till death is just at hand. This would be contrary to the whole spirit of this parable, and of the rest of our Lord's teaching.

Some have supposed that there is no figurative signification at all intended by the sleeping of the virgins; and that it is only mentioned as giving force and reality to the narrative, as being a circumstance actually taking place on any such occasion. Some again consider, that as the bridegroom's coming represents the coming of Christ to judgment at the end of the world, so, the sleep of the attendants represents the sleep of the grave; on waking from which, some will find themselves prepared, and others unprepared, to meet Him.

Others understand our Lord to denote by this sleep, the imperfection and occasional negligence of even the best Christians. This seems to me the least probable interpretation; because, First, though it is very true that the best Christians are not exempt from sins and negligences, *this* truth was not the one which our Lord was at that time occupied in inculcating. His object was not, in this discourse, to direct our attention to the imperfections of the best Christians, but to contrast their behaviour and their final doom with that of the negligent.—Secondly, because though slumbering would have afforded a very suitable figure to denote spiritual negligence, it is not the figure which Jesus is *here* employing; it is by the having, or not having, a provision of *oil*, that, in this parable, He is denoting timely and diligent preparation, and the want of it. If, however, He had used these two figures with the same signification in the same parable, He would surely have represented the foolish virgins as sleeping more profoundly, or longer, than the wise ones; especially as it was his object to contrast the two in respect of this very point.—Thirdly, and chiefly, because the wise virgins are not described as having done anything *blameable* in sleeping,—as failing in anything that had been required of them,—or as meeting with any kind of rebuke at all: now it does not seem to me likely that He would have represented the blameable, though pardonable, negligence of Christians, by

a circumstance in the parable which implied no fault at all, and incurred no blame.

Some again may think (and this appears to me, on the whole, the most likely interpretation) that as the wise virgins, holding themselves quite ready, waited in repose till they should be called on to meet their Master, so, the wise Christian, though always living with a view to the next world, does not think himself bound to withdraw from all the concerns of life, or, when he is not in expectation of speedy death, to renounce every occupation in this world (as he would do, even the most virtuous, if he felt sure he had but a few days to live); but, studying to be always ready, and in such a state as to be fit to die, whether suddenly or otherwise, feels no anxious dread lest he should be called away without a distinct warning; yet if he has this warning granted him, takes advantage of it to wind up (as we express it) his worldly affairs, and to bring himself into such a frame of mind as befits the solemnity of the occasion; just as a diligent and zealous servant of any king, if summoned into the royal presence, would assume a suitable dress and demeanour for presenting himself before his master; though if his king should think fit to visit him unawares he would have no occasion to be ashamed or alarmed at the visit, since he would be found occupied as becomes a good servant, in the business allotted to him.

The question, however, which I have touched on, is not essential to the present subject; since, as I have said, we can clearly determine, as far as is here needful, what this part of the parable does *not* mean.

Those who wish to consult the earliest divines on the subject of this parable, are referred to Whitby's Paraphrase, who mentions the expositions of Origen, Chrysostom, Jerom, and others, and refers also to Ecclesiasticus xviii. 21, 22.

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THE END.

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